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Race and Politics in America
A Special Issue

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Introduction

by
James Jennings

This special issue of the *Trotter Review* is devoted to a broad range of topics related to race, power, and voting. Although voting is a critically important political tool for black America, the vote does not necessarily guarantee that a group will enjoy power in society. At the same time that we seek greater rates of voter registration and turnout at all levels of the electoral process, we must also continue to struggle towards an agenda that delivers power to the black community.

The issue opens with an explanation of why statehood for Washington, D.C., should be a key item on the black agenda. Statehood could result in greater political influence for blacks. But, as Reverend Jesse Jackson reminds us, statehood for the District of Columbia is also important in ensuring that the nation practices what it preaches by adhering to the principles of a democratic society.

Although the national campaigns of both George Bush and Bill Clinton seem to be ignoring the role of black voters, Clarence Lusane describes how the black vote will remain a critical factor in determining the final outcome of the 1992 presidential election.

The shoddy treatment meted out to loyal black voters by many leaders in the Democratic party may encourage voters to "to go another way," as pointed out by May Louie. She suggests that Bill Clinton has aggressively attempted to show white voters that he does not want to be overly associated with black voters if it means the loss of white voters' support.

Although voting is a critically important political tool for black America, the vote does not necessarily guarantee that a group will enjoy power in society.

As black America considers how to pursue the vote and gain power, it must appreciate the role of black women. Black women will play a very important role in determining the future of black politics. Journalist Dorothy Clark points out how this is consistent with the history of black women in American politics despite the fact that many barriers have existed to prevent black women from asserting themselves politically.

Historians James Green and Robert Hayden illustrate the important role of labor in the pursuit of black political power by examining briefly the life of Asa Philip Randolph. Based on interviews and research, Green and Hayden show how the labor activism of blacks in the 1930s and 1940s was a critical element in the survival of the black community. Many of the gains made today in urban politics had their roots in the leadership and activism of individuals like Randolph.

To pursue the vote and power effectively also requires a technical understanding of the legal processes, procedures, and regulations governing the right to vote. Alex Willingham summarizes how the Reagan administration attempted to weaken the right and exercise of the vote by blacks. He gives many concrete examples of attempts to dilute the impact of black voting strength. Sheila Ards and Marjorie Lewis share with the reader a synopsis of how researchers determine the practice of minority vote dilution and suggest how such methods could be improved.

In 1992, again, the Republicans proposed that blacks should leave the Democratic party because the latter takes them for granted. The Democrats proposed that blacks cannot afford another national Republican administration. This is not a new debate. As suggested by William Monroe Trotter in the early 1900s, there may yet be a third way. Rather than support a Republican or a Democrat, Ron Daniels has decided to run for president. In the last article, Harold Horton, summarizes the views of this long-time, highly respected activist. Like a growing number of black activists, Daniels believes that only through a grassroots, independent candidacy can blacks effectively use the vote to gain greater political and economic power.

James Jennings is a professor of political science at the University of Massachusetts at Boston and director of the Trotter Institute. He is the author of *The Politics of Black Empowerment: The Transformation of Black Activism in Urban America.*

A Moral Appeal to President George Bush

by

Reverend Jesse Jackson

The following is the text of a letter written by Reverend Jesse Jackson to President George Bush dated May 1, 1991, as a plea for statehood for the District of Columbia, where 650,000 citizens are politically disenfranchised.

Dear Mr. President:

I trust this letter finds you well. Thank you very much for receiving me at the White House on Tuesday, March 26. I found our meeting to be very positive. I hope you agree.

I wanted to follow up on our conversation regarding statehood for the District of Columbia with a substantive letter and a moral appeal.

I believe our case is strong and irrefutable. If the statehood petition for the District of Columbia is considered on its merits and the substantive arguments, District of Columbia statehood cannot be denied.

The case for District of Columbia statehood can be summarized in ten words. It is morally right, rationally sound, economically feasible, legally possible and constitutionally permitted. Let me expand upon each premise:

District of Columbia statehood is morally right.

The American Revolution was declared under the principle that taxation without representation is tyranny. There are nearly 650,000 taxpaying American citizens in the District of Columbia who have no federal voting representation in Congress. We have enough people, pay enough taxes, and, in times of war, bleed and die enough. District of Columbia residents have fought and died in every war since the War for Independence. During the Vietnam War, the District of Columbia had more casualties than ten states, and more killed per capita than forty-seven states.

The District of Columbia had more total reservists in the Persian Gulf than nineteen states (including Puerto Rico), and more per capita than all but four—Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, and West Virginia. We believe that these honorable young men and women should return home to enjoy the same right of self-determination for which they risked their lives during Operation Desert Storm to restore the Kuwaiti monarchy. We also believe that since they assumed the obligation to serve their country in the military and fought for their country in a time of war, they should return to a democratic society at home with the same rights and privileges as all other Americans who served their country in a similar way.

Mr. President, you have been an avid and unwavering supporter of Puerto Rican statehood. Your letter to members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on February 28, the same day you declared a cease-fire in the Middle East, profoundly stated that, "If we do not act now to resolve this question [of Puerto Rico's status], it will call into question whether we truly believe in self-determination for 3.6 million of our fellow citizens."[1] You reminded the committee members that young men and women from Puerto Rico were fighting in the Persian Gulf. I applaud your convictions and the democratic principles you expound in your support for self-determination for the residents of Puerto Rico.

The case for District of Columbia statehood can be summarized in ten words. It is morally right, rationally sound, economically feasible, legally possible and constitutionally permitted.

The New World Order that you envision must be based upon sound principles that are applied consistently everywhere, beginning at home. I support the principle of self-determination in Kuwait, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. After considering the case for District of Columbia statehood, I hope that you will revisit your prior reluctance to accept the District of Columbia's petition for admission to the Union.

District of Columbia statehood is rationally sound.

While the U.S. Constitution does not define specific conditions for statehood, Congress, over the years, has developed certain standards and procedures for the admission of new states. Historically, statehood has been granted when three criteriawere met: (1) the people, through some democratic process, express their desire to become a state (the District of Columbia passed a

referendum); (2) the people accept the republican form of government required by the Constitution and practiced in the United States; and (3) there are sufficient people and economic resources to support a state. The District of Columbia passes all three of the traditional tests for statehood.

District of Columbia statehood is economically feasible.

District of Columbia residents pay over a billion dollars annually in federal taxes—more total federal taxes than eight states. The per capita tax payment for the District of Columbia is $500 above the national average—payment higher than forty-nine states.

One misconception which has been traditionally embraced by statehood opponents is that the federal government pays most of the District's operating costs. In reality, the opposite is true. The federal government does not subsidize us. We subsidize the federal government and the adjoining states. You will find as you read this letter that we pay more, and, in fact, a disproportionate share of federal income taxes. In reality, we are cheated out of billions of dollars by the federal government, Maryland, and Virginia.

Can we afford statehood? You strongly favor statehood for Puerto Rico. The per capita income in Puerto Rico is $6,000; for the nation, $19,000; and for the District, $24,000. It is estimated by some experts that adding Puerto Rico to the Union on an "Equal Footing" with all other states will cost the federal government an additional $17 billion. I support their choice, their right to self-determination. If their financial status is no barrier to your supporting statehood for them, then certainly the District's positive financial resources should only bolster our case for admission to the Union.

The District has been exploited economically. *Financing the Nation's Capital,* also known as the (Alice) Rivlin Report, was a study commissioned to analyze and make recommendations relative to the financial crisis facing the nation's capital. Its findings of just how unfairly Congress and its neighboring states have treated the District are revealing.[2]

The Senate in South Africa looks just like the U. S. Senate. It does not reflect or represent all of the people.

The Congress has imposed special costs on the District because it is the nation's capital. While restricting the District's ability to raise revenues to meet those costs, Congress has failed to provide adequate compensation through a fair federal payment.

Approximately 50 percent of the District's real estate is exempt from taxation because it belongs to the federal government, diplomatic missions, or other tax-exempt organizations. In addition, while we understand and support the limitation on the height of buildings in the District (restricted to ninety feet), in purely economic terms, it reduces the income we can collect from property taxes.

Furthermore, approximately half of all sales in the District are to the federal government or other tax-exempt organizations, producing no revenue to the District government.

Most importantly, the District is prohibited by law from taxing incomes of nonresidents at their source, which results in *60 percent* of all income earned in the District being exempt from District taxes. What is the estimated cost to the District? $1.2 billion. No state has such restrictions. In fact, people who work in New York but live in New Jersey, pay taxes where they work (at the source of the income earned) and get a tax adjustment where they live. All states have the same right. Congress has prohibited the District government from negotiating a similar reciprocal taxing agreement with Maryland and Virginia.

The federal government has also imposed three other major financial obligations on the District. First, the federal government established pension plans for police officers and fire fighters (1916), teachers (1920), and judges (1970). The federal government's "pay-as-you-go" plan, however, was inadequate for workers' *future* security. When limited self-rule was granted in 1974, Congress assumed only 25 percent of the costs, while imposing on the District 75 percent of the liability they created. This clearly represented an unfair formula. By the year 2004, it is estimated that this unfunded pension liability will have grown to $8 billion.

Second, upon granting the District home rule, the federal government forced the District to assume a $378 million operating deficit that Congress, not the District, had created.

Third, the federal government transferred St. Elizabeth's Hospital to the District government in 1985, and authorized $31.5 million (with no provision for inflation) for certain capital improvements to meet safety standards. The federal government never appropriated the funds, and now the same work is estimated to cost $88 million.

Finally, the federal payment—a payment partially in lieu of taxes, but primarily for services rendered to the federal government, not welfare or a special subsidy—has steadily declined as a percentage of the District's budget since home rule was established. It has declined from 25 percent to 13 percent of the District's current $3.6 billion budget. The federal payment has been frozen at $430.5 million since 1985. Taxes *forgone* increased over 50 percent from 1985 to 1990, to $1.8 billion, while the federal payment remained constant.

The $100 million that Congress granted to Mayor Dixon reflects well on lobbying efforts, but does not reflect well on what Congress owes the District. Yesterday, a House committee voted in favor of legislation which would, for the first time, establish a funding formula upon which to base the federal payment. This

will remove the arbitrary nature of the payment and help stabilize the budget process for the District. The percentage, however, may not totally reflect fairness in terms of compensation for services rendered and taxes foregone because of the federal presence. This is, however, a step in the right direction.

District of Columbia statehood is legally possible.

Statehood for the District of Columbia does not require a constitutional amendment and ratification by the states. It only requires a simple majority vote in the House and Senate and the president's signature. Every other state admission has been accomplished through congressional legislation. The District of Columbia does not require, and should not be made, an exception. No entity applying for admission to the Union has ever been turned down by Congress. Again, since we meet all of the historic criteria, we should not be the first.

District of Columbia statehood is constitutionally permitted.

The District of Columbia is the federal seat of government as required by the Constitution. Our legislative proposal (H.R. 51) for creating the state of New Columbia out of newly structured nonfederal parts of the current District, means that New Columbia and the federal seat of government would constitutionally coexist harmoniously.

In summary, let me raise and answer the basic constitutional questions involved.

Does Article I, Section 8, Clause 17 of the U.S. Constitution prohibit Congress, through legislation, from forming a new state from part of the land that currently comprises the District of Columbia? **No.**

This "District Clause" grants Congress exclusive legislative authority over the federal seat of government (District of Columbia), which is not to exceed ten miles square (i.e., 100 square miles). No minimum size is required.

Thus, if Congress has exclusive legislative authority over the District, it can dispose of some land in order to create the state of New Columbia, while preserving the federal seat of government. Congress reduced the original size of the District in 1846 by returning to Virginia the land originally given by them. The current federal seat of government is comprised of land contributed by Maryland.

The constitutionally required federal seat of government would be preserved by maintaining the District of Columbia in the form of a *National Capital Service Area*. It would be comprised of key federal buildings and agencies (e.g., the White House, Congress, Supreme Court, the Mall, and monuments, etc.) and allow the federal government to conduct its functions in safety and security—the original purpose of creating the federal seat. The Constitution, therefore, does not force a choice between *seathood* and *statehood*.

Does District of Columbia statehood require a constitutional amendment? **No.**

District of Columbia statehood requires a simple majority vote in the House and Senate and the president's signature. Since the founding of the original thirteen states, it is the way *all* territories have become states.

The Constitution does not define specific conditions for the admission of new states. But the District of Columbia meets the three traditional statehood tests imposed by Congress: (1) the people, through some democratic process, express their desire to become a state (the District of Columbia voted for statehood in a 1980 referendum); (2) acceptance of a republican form of government; and (3) enough people and economic wealth to support a state.

An amendment is not required to terminate congressional control over the District because once New Columbia is admitted to the Union, Congress permanently relinquishes its power to legislate over it. Congress retains its jurisdiction over the federal seat of government as mandated by the Constitution.

Of the 115 nations in the world with elected legislatures, including Moscow and Beijing, we stand alone in denying residents of the capital city the right to participate and be represented in their national legislative body.

Is Maryland's consent required before Congress can admit New Columbia into the Union? **No.**

Maryland's formal consent is not a constitutional prerequisite to statehood. Article IV, Section 3, Clause 1 of the Constitution, requiring consent of affected states to admission of a new state, does not apply in this case because Maryland no longer has power over the land that it ceded to the federal government 200 years ago.

Maryland's consent is not required because Maryland, in its 1791 cession of land to the federal government, expressed its clear intent to "forever cede and relinquish . . . in full and absolute right and exclusive jurisdiction . . ." the land to the federal government.

If so intended, state law required that Maryland explicitly state that it expected the land to be returned after the federal government finished using it. The language used by Maryland in its cession of the land to create the District of Columbia stated just the opposite. Maryland's clear intent was to permanently and unconditionally relinquish its sovereignty over the territory.

Does granting statehood to New Columbia require the repeal of the Twenty-Third Amendment to the Constitution, which granted District residents representation in the electoral college and thus the right to vote for presidential candidates? **No.**

The Twenty-Third Amendment will not serve to bar

District of Columbia statehood. The amendment granted participation in the electoral college to the residents of the federal seat of government. Once admitted to the Union, the lands constituting the state of New Columbia would no longer be a part of the federal seat of government, and thus, the Twenty-Third Amendment would not apply.

The purpose of the Twenty-Third Amendment—to give District of Columbia residents the right to vote in presidential elections—would be fulfilled. Residents still living in the District of Columbia, the federal seat of government, would vote in New Columbia, just as citizens of all other federal enclaves (e.g., federal military bases) vote in the elections of those respective states.

Congress could enact clarifying legislation granting federal enclave residents the right to vote in New Columbia, just as it did when it provided for Americans overseas to participate in state elections at home.

The admission of New Columbia may render the Twenty-Third Amendment moot. This result is neither unprecedented nor unconstitutional. Rather, the amendment would join other obsolete yet unrepealed provisions of the Constitution. For example, Article I, Section 9, limiting the tax imposed on imported slaves to $10, remains on the books.

Thus, Mr. President, if District of Columbia statehood is moral, rational, economically feasible, legal, and constitutional, why not support it?

The form and structure of our relationship to Congress is similar and comparable to that of Soweto and Pretoria, South Africa. In Soweto, the people can vote for a mayor and city council, who then appoint a police and fire chief; and they administer some funds from Pretoria. The people of Soweto, however, cannot vote on policy in Pretoria.

In the District of Columbia, we elect our own mayor and district council, who appoint a police and fire chief; and we administer some funds from Congress. However, we cannot vote on policy in Congress. The Senate in South Africa looks just like the U. S. Senate. It does not reflect or represent all of the people.

In your administration, you advocate the laudable goal of empowerment. Your education and housing programs are built on the premise of empowering parents and tenants. There could be no clearer case for empowerment, than of empowering the nearly 650,000 politically disenfranchised citizens of the nation's capital.

Of the 115 nations in the world with elected legislatures, including Moscow and Beijing, we stand alone in denying residents of the capital city the right to participate and be represented in their national legislative body.

Last year, Congressmen Ralph Regula and Stan Parris introduced two different pieces of legislation. Both, in their own way, would have had the effect of politically retroceding the citizens of the District of Columbia to Maryland. It is true that both of their solutions would have eliminated the moral wrong and undemocratic practice of inflicting taxation without representation upon District residents. In a democracy, however, taxation without representation is one, but not the only or primary issue involved.

Inherent in democracy is the right of self-determination, subject only to extenuating circumstances or other prohibitive factors—factors which do not exist in the District. People living in a democracy have the right to be governed with the consent of the governed. District of Columbia and Maryland residents overwhelmingly rejected both of these proposals.

Congress does not have a moral or democratic right to impose a solution upon the District against the will of the people. In a democracy, the means and ends must be consistent. Statehood is the choice of the people in the District of Columbia.

Finally, Mr. President, one of the most important ideas in our democratic form of government is the concept of checks and balances. Yet, in the District of Columbia, we have none. In the *Dred Scott* case of 1857, the issue was race, and the Court said blacks had no rights which a white was bound to respect. In the District of Columbia, in 1991, the issue is representation, and our national legislative and executive branches say District of Columbia citizens have no rights which they must respect.

Congress does not have a moral or democratic right to impose a solution upon the District against the will of the people. Statehood is the choice of the people in the District of Columbia.

This formula runs counter to the democratic foundations and traditions of this great country. We appeal to you, Mr. President, to help fix this crack in the Liberty Bell. We appeal to you, in your quest to establish a New World Order, to stand for the sound principles of self-determination, representation, and democracy at home as well as in foreign lands.

We appeal to you to expand democracy in the cradle and capital of democracy, Washington, D.C., to include all of the American people. If you do so, you will go down in history as a great president, as a president who acted on principle, and practiced those principles by applying them at home as well as abroad.

Mr. President, this is our plight and our plea. We hope you will reconsider our just case. Thank you for hearing our appeal.

Notes

[1]Congressional Record, 28 February 1991.

[2]Commission on Budget and Financial Priorities of the District of Columbia, *Financing the Nation's Capitol* (Washington, D.C.: November 1990).

Reverend Jesse Jackson is president and founder of the National Rainbow Coalition and a former candidate for president.

A Historic Moment: Black Voters and the 1992 Presidential Race

by
Clarence Lusane

November 2, 1991, may well be remembered as a watershed date in the unique and quixotic 1992 presidential race. On that day, stating that he would "not seek the nomination for the Democratic Party,"[1] Jesse Jackson backed out of the presidential campaign spotlight and started a chain reaction that has put the black vote in perhaps its least influential position since before 1984.

Extremely low black voter turnout was one of the most significant trends of the 1992 primaries. In the Democratic contests, Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton won an impressive percentage of black votes, about 70 percent. However, those votes were garnered in the context of the smallest black voter turnout for a presidential primary in a decade.

In key states, particularly in the South, black voter turnout in the 1992 primaries was embarrassingly depressed. Clinton won less than half of the votes that Jackson received in 1988 in Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Texas. Jackson won more than 1.8 million votes in those states while Clinton managed to win less than 860,000. In 1988, 113,286 blacks voted for Jackson in the Tennessee primary; in 1992, Clinton won only 35,086 black votes.

Extremely low black voter turnout was one of the most significant trends of the 1992 primaries.

In Louisiana, Jackson's black vote was 245,784 compared to Clinton's 85,951 in 1992. In 1988, Jackson won 91 percent and 88 percent of the black vote in Illinois and Maryland, respectfully. Clinton's black vote in those two states, in a less crowded field, was only 70 percent and 49 percent, respectfully. Overall, Clinton averaged between 49 percent and 90 percent of the black vote during the primary, while in 1988, Jackson averaged between 88 percent and 95 percent of the black vote.[2]

According to exit polls conducted during the last primaries in late May and early June, black voter dissatisfaction with Clinton had increased. *USA Today* reported that Clinton's appeal to black voters had fallen to about 50 percent.[3] Meanwhile, Clinton's hold on black voters was being challenged by the campaign of Texas billionaire H. Ross Perot. In California, Perot was attracting support from about 18 percent of blacks across the state, according to *USA Today*.[4] In Los Angeles, 22 percent of the blacks who voted in the primary voiced support for Perot. Nationwide, according to a CBS News poll, Perot was winning at least 12 percent of the black vote.[5]

However, when the primary season came to an end in June, Clinton had secured more Democratic primary victories than any candidate since Lyndon Johnson.[6] Having vanquished all comers, there was little question that Clinton was solidly in control of the nomination. In addition, President Bush's ratings were at an all-time low for a sitting president, about 33–35 percent.[7] In any other presidential election year, the Democratic nominee's camp would be in a state of unabridged celebration. As it turned out, however, it was not the expected challengers who were the problem, but the unanticipated, and then underestimated, outsider who changed the overall picture of the race.

By the end of June, poll after poll showed Perot leading Bush with Clinton generally coming in third.[8] It became clear that electorate animosity was aimed not only at the White House, but also Congress and the Democratic party. In addition, Clinton's early primary scandals (questions concerning adultery, draft dodging, and marijuana smoking) had severely damaging effects on his campaign and led many to believe that he was headed towards defeat.

Politically skittish about the perception of being held hostage by the so-called special interest groups, blacks and organized labor, and, more often than not, seeking to keep his distance from Jesse Jackson, Clinton's campaign (and most of the rest of the Democratic party leadership) carried out a strategy that sought to win white, mainly suburban, mostly middle-class votes. This group of voters is popularly known as the Reagan

Democrats because they voted for Ronald Reagan in 1980 and 1984, and, to a lesser degree, for George Bush in 1988. In selecting Clinton, a moderate Democrat who criticized traditional Democratic social programs, Democratic party conservatives hoped to send a signal that it was time for the Reagan Democrats to come home.

Black Voters' Discontent

Clinton's troubles with the black vote can be accounted for in a number of ways. First, after two presidential elections in which Jackson ran strong in the primaries, a large number of blacks were not motivated to vote for a white candidate. When Jackson declined to run and Virginia Governor Douglas Wilder left the race early, many blacks concluded that the remaining candidates, all of whom were white, had few ties to black voters and had expressed little interest in black community concerns.

Second, Clinton's positions on many issues do not sit well with many black political activists. His positions supporting the death penalty, calling for welfare reform, proposing prison work camps, and pledging tax breaks for the "middle class"—widely interpreted to mean middle-class whites—make many black activists wary.

Clinton's plea for racial harmony was offset by his unwillingness to address forthrightly concerns expressed by black voters.

His incessant call to "save the middle class," led some blacks to initially support Jerry Brown or Tom Harkin in the early days of the primary season. Clinton's plea for racial harmony was offset by his unwillingness to address forthrightly concerns expressed by black voters. While Jackson in his campaigns highlighted the breadth of interests expressed by the black community, including South Africa, Haiti, affirmative action, funding for social programs, and aid to the inner cities, Clinton only raised these issues in a very limited way and, generally, only with black audiences.

Third, Clinton's public spats with Jackson also alienated him from many blacks. At one point, when he was erroneously informed that Jackson had endorsed another candidate, Clinton lost his cool and let loose an emotional outburst that was captured on videotape, shrieking that what Jackson did was ". . . an outrage. A dirty, double-crossing, back-stabbing thing to do. For him to do this, for me to hear this on a television program is an act of absolute dishonor."[9] Clinton also snubbed Jackson by not inviting him to speak before a meeting of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), the organization of conservative Democrats over which Clinton once presided.

In early June, in a gesture that was meant to ease the strained relations between the two, Jackson invited Clinton to speak before a gathering of the National Rainbow Coalition, the organization headed by Jackson. Clinton used the opportunity to sharply criticize Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition for having invited rap singer Sister Souljah to speak at the conference the previous night. Clinton berated conference organizers for inviting the singer after the *Washington Post* reported that she had called for a week of killing whites following the Los Angeles rebellions, remarks she says were taken out-of-context.[10]

It is broadly believed that Clinton's attack on Sister Souljah was a calculated political tactic engineered by his campaign to demonstrate his willingness to challenge Jackson and other constituencies viewed by many whites as Democratic special interests. To a great degree, Clinton's gamble paid off. He won support from moderate and liberal white columnists,[11] the *New York Times* editorial page,[12] and certain black elected officials including Cleveland Mayor Michael White and Representative Mike Espy (D-MS).

Jackson and many of his supporters responded angrily to Clinton's verbal attack on Souljah and argued that millions of black voters were being turned off by these kind of tactics and insults.[13] Ron Walters, chairman of Howard University's Political Science Department, wrote that "this incident will, no doubt, deepen the cynicism in the black community with respect to the current election and about Clinton's candidacy in particular.[14]

Black Votes vs. White Votes

Most important, however, is the belief of a number of black political experts that Clinton has little chance of winning if there is a depressed black voter turnout. In the last three presidential elections, the Democratic party has lost about two-thirds of the white vote.[15] Of the three elections won by the Democratic party since 1960—John Kennedy, 1960; Lyndon Johnson, 1964; and Jimmy Carter, 1976—the black vote has been pivotal in two, in 1960 and 1976. In 1960, the black vote was critical in fifteen states that totaled 209 electoral votes for Kennedy, more than two-thirds of the total he needed to win.[16] Nationwide, Kennedy won 70 percent of the black vote.[17] In 1976, southerner Carter won only 45 percent of the white vote in the South, but won more than 90 percent of the black vote.[18]

It has been argued that if Democratic nominees Walter Mondale in 1984 and Michael Dukakis in 1988 had aggressively registered and turned out traditional Democratic constituencies, particularly in the black community, they may have won. Dukakis won 86–90 percent of the black vote, but only 41–44 percent of the white vote.[19] Clinton's chances of winning without a massive black turnout, while not impossible, is still highly questionable.

Clinton's campaign strategy of going after the white suburban vote, however, is one of desperation. Even with a strong black voter turnout, Clinton can not win without getting close to half or more of the white vote, something the Democrats have not done in a presidential

election since 1964. The inability to win at least half of the white vote has meant that, in recent presidential elections, the Democrats have lost in every southern state despite winning close to 90 percent of the black vote. In one poll taken at the end of May, Clinton was only winning about 20 percent of the white vote.[20]

For the Democrats, as with this year's black vote, there was a sharp decline in the white vote during the 1992 primaries. In Mississippi and New Jersey, for example, white voter turnout for the Democrats fell sharply from 1988 levels. In Mississippi, white voter turnout dropped 44 percent and in New Jersey, it fell 41 percent. Dramatic white voter decline has also existed in states that will be critical to a Democratic victory in November, including California (11 percent), Florida (12 percent), and New York (28 percent).[21]

Clinton's chances of winning without a massive black turnout, while not impossible, is still highly questionable...

To win back the white vote, the Clinton campaign has elaborated a strategy that targets the suburban vote where about half of the electorate is located. Rather than focus on the South or on urban areas, this strategy is aimed at such predominantly suburban states as California, Oregon, Washington, Montana, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, New York, and Connecticut, among others.[22]

Within the framework of the suburban strategy, the impact of the black vote is greatly diminished. The southern states, where over half of the black vote is located, are written off, for the most part. With Clinton and his vice-presidential choice, Senator Al Gore of Tennessee, on the ticket, it is very possible that the Democrats will win in Arkansas and Tennessee. However, they are given a slim chance of winning in other southern states, even with a high black voter turnout. The Clinton-Gore ticket, therefore, has placed top priority on targeted suburban areas in the Midwest, the West Coast, and Eastern Seaboard—regions where the black vote is minimal.

In the days immediately following the Democratic National Convention, this strategy appeared to have a tremendous appeal. In a *USA Today*-CNN poll, Clinton had bounced back from a preconvention rating of about 25 percent to 53 percent only three days after the convention.[23] Clinton's distancing himself from Jackson and his image as a solid moderate as a result of the convention contributed to his surge.

Black Vote Potential

Still, the black community has the ability to significantly impact the election. Clinton could win in a close election if he is the beneficiary of a strong, united black voter turnout. A depressed black voter turnout would probably nullify black voter impact, but a united black vote would be a highly attractive prize. Clinton has shown to some degree that he wants that block of votes and has toned down his rhetoric concerning a tax cut for the (white) middle class.

Perot has done precious little outreach to communities of color. In fact, his remarks concerning gays, where he stated that he would not select a gay person to be in his cabinet and added that he would not "just limit it to that category," sent an alarming warning signal to many blacks about his prejudices.[24] Perot further alienated himself from blacks when he referred to them as "you people" in a major speech before the NAACP national convention. African Americans have other reasons to fear Perot. His drug war campaign in Texas called for the cordoning off of black and Hispanic communities, to the enduring ire of local black leaders, and his intervention also led to the weakening of the hard-won Dallas Police Citizens Review Board.[25]

Clinton was undoubtedly puzzled and surprised by earlier polls showing that a significant number of blacks planned to vote for Perot. Perot won the support of New York's influential Reverend Calvin Butts and the former football great, O.J. Simpson. Rumors were even circulating that Virginia Governor Douglas Wilder was at one time being considered as a vice-presidential choice by the Perot camp.

It remains to be seen if the Democrats will find a way to inspire a large and supportive black voter turnout in November. Clinton's selection of issues, the Democratic party's treatment of Jackson, the strategies employed by Clinton's black supporters, the actions of Jackson, and now the Perot candidacy will determine the nature of the black vote and, perhaps, the outcome of the presidential race itself.

Notes

[1]Jesse Jackson, "We Are Campaigning to Build a New Democratic Majority and Rebuild America," speech, 2 November 1991.

[2]"Clinton's Support Among Blacks Lags Behind Jackson's in 1988," *Washington Times*, 3 April 1992.

[3]Richard Benedetto, "Perot Attracts Support From Swing Voters," *USA Today*, 17 June 1992.

[4]Ron Walters, "A Breakthrough Among Blacks?," *USA Today*, 9 June 1992.

[5]Richard Berke, "Some Gaps Emerge in Perot's Appeal," *New York Times*, 10 June 1992.

[6]Jonathan Alter, "Clinton in the Twilight Zone," *Newsweek*, 15 June 1992, 28.

[7]"Perot: Can He Become America's Big 1990s Political Force?," *The American Political Report*, 5 June 1992, 1.

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[9]Howard Kurtz, "In Instant Replay, Clinton's Unvarnished Emotion," *Washington Post*, 29 February 1992.

[10]David Mills, "Sister Souljah's Call to Arms," *Washington Post*, 13 May 1992; and Carleton R.Bryant, "Sister Souljah Makes Most of Clinton's Ire," *Washington Times*, 16 June 1992.

[11]See Richard Cohen, "Sister Souljah: Clinton's Gumption," and Mary McGrory, "Backing Jackson Into a Corner," *Washington Post*, 16 June 1992; and Richard Benedetto, "Clinton Shows No Sign of Bowing to Jackson," *USA Today*, 19 June 1992.

[12]Editorial, "Sister Souljah Is No Willie Horton," *New York Times*, 17 June 1992.

[13]R. W. Apple, Jr., "Jackson Sees a 'Character Flaw' in Clinton's Remarks on Racism," *New York Times*, 19 June 1992.

(continued on page 19)

Race and Presidential Politics '92: The Challenge to Go Another Way

by
May Louie

"The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line." – W. E. B. Du Bois

At presidential election time in 1992, America is once again looking at limited political options for national leadership. The Republican party platform is its most conservative ever. The Democratic party ticket is dominated by southern Dixiecrats. And we who have marched and organized, and risked and sacrificed much for racial equality and political empowerment, must now match our sense of foreboding with our determination to meet the challenge before us. Jesse Jackson's 1984 and 1988 nation-shaking, agenda-setting presidential campaigns took us to places we had never been before and gave us a glimpse at the possibility of racial and economic justice. Those who felt the power of those campaigns and of Jackson's message must now forge a movement and a vision far beyond the choice we must now face.

A Nation in Pain

Twelve years of Reagan-Bush have meant deep and widespread pain and polarization. A Republican administration, with complicity for the most part from a Democratic Congress, has orchestrated a wholesale shift of wealth from the poor and middle class to the very rich. Now the top 1 percent of the population controls more wealth than the bottom 90 percent.

Massive disinvestment in the country and its people has resulted in 10 million unemployed, another 10 million underemployed; 35 million in poverty; and 37 million without health insurance. In June of 1991, Bridgeport, Connecticut, the largest city in the wealthiest county in the richest state of the Union, declared bankruptcy. Earlier this year, Los Angeles exploded, with San Francisco, Atlanta, Seattle, and other cities following suit.

Twelve years of Reagan-Bush have meant deep and widespread pain and polarization.

Mass discontent is enormous. Disclosures of corruption and abuse of power (e.g., the House Bank scandal) have created a demand for change so great that there will be a historic changing of the guard in the U.S. Congress, with a record number of incumbents resigning or losing re-election. In June 1992, an ABC News/*Washington Post* poll reported that 82 percent of Americans feel that "both political parties are pretty much out of touch with the American people."[1]

And in this period of great suffering and alienation, what do those who would be president offer?

Neither the Democrats nor the Republicans, neither Bill Clinton nor George Bush, have a vision or a plan for solving the nation's economic and social problems. They have each moved to the right of the American people. They have played to people's fears and racism to divide and to divert attention from the country's problems.

The American people favor a national health plan, full employment policies, and taxing the rich. They are overwhelmingly in favor of reproductive rights and environmental protection. They are indeed against "special interests," defining these not as minorities and labor, but as big business and the rich. The American people are more progressive than the parties, the candidates, and the platforms. But it is also true that they have deep-seated racial prejudices that can be, and have repeatedly been, manipulated by politicians and those who have no interest in economic justice and democratic freedoms.

The Road to the White House: Divide and Conquer

In 1980 and 1984, Ronald Reagan sowed division and fear, and won. From his 1980 campaign announcement in Philadelphia, Mississippi, the site of the brutal mur-

ders of three civil rights workers, Schwerner, Goodman, and Chaney, to his crushing of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO), the Reagan presidency pitted people against each other and convinced many to vote against their own interests.

In 1988, both George Bush and Michael Dukakis ran campaigns that fundamentally excluded minorities. Bush did not need or want the minority vote. Dukakis took it for granted. They both vied for the Reagan Democrats as the key to victory.

Emerging from the 1988 Atlanta convention with a seventeen-point lead in the polls and a united party, Dukakis ran fast and far from the Democratic party's most loyal political constituency, African Americans. From July to November, the Dukakis campaign held only five rallies in urban settings. Four of those occurred in the last two weeks of the election in response to his low showing in the polls. All of these urban rallies were held after 5:00 P.M., so that they would not be carried on network news. He flinched every time the Republicans used the word *liberal*. He treated Jesse Jackson as someone to be "handled" and minimized rather than dealt with as the leader of a considerable coalition, the recipient of 7 million votes in the primary season, and a force to be consulted and included.

The American people are more progressive than the parties, the candidates, and the platforms.

George Bush's use of racism, on the other hand, was not defensive, but very offensive. He used the Willie Horton issue as the snapshot view of a Dukakis presidency, thereby feeding white fear of African-American male violence and rape. He used the idea of the welfare queen to attack social programs, again playing on white resentment and stereotypes of minorities as parasites on society.

Dukakis won the Reagan Democrats, but he lost the election. He won the urban vote, but his strategy depressed that vote below 1984 levels. In key states where Dukakis lost by a narrow margin, an inspired urban vote would have put that state's electoral votes in Dukakis's column. With an urban vote at 1984 levels, he would have won the presidency. There are at least twelve states in which the number of unregistered and nonvoting African Americans exceeded the number of votes by which Dukakis lost.

Dukakis lost, not because he was too liberal, but because he ran away from a populist message and a loyal popular base. His cold, hard, "competency" campaign failed to inspire and rally people.

Enter the Democratic Leadership Council

This year's presidential election takes this race-signal politics to another level. Bill Clinton and the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) are competing with George Bush on his own racist turf, but with a slicker veneer.

The Democratic Leadership Council was formed in 1985 to vie for control of the Democratic party. Comprised mainly of moderate and conservative southerners, it set the goal of bringing the party back to the political center. It wanted to appeal to middle-class voters, and to move away from "special interest" groups. In 1991, when Bill Clinton was the chairman of the DLC, it declared its intention to form fifty state chapters. These, of course, formed the nucleus of Clinton's national apparatus in the presidential primaries the following year.

At the 1990 DLC conference in New Orleans, Jesse Jackson gave a speech, *Delighted to be United*, in which he praised the Dixiecrats for finally embracing many of his long-held positions, including reductions in the military budget, fighting the war on drugs, etc. Jesse Jackson is, minimally, the symbol of the progressive politics that the DLC opposes. They needed him on the other side. As he embraced them on areas of common ground, they were stunned, and undermined, and would never again give him a platform. In 1991 and 1992, the group excluded Jesse Jackson from speaking.

Jackson's ascendancy in America is the DLC's worst nightmare. Jackson thwarted the Dixiecrats' earlier plans to increase southern conservative influence over the Democratic presidential selection process through the creation of super Tuesday (which concentrated a large number of southern primaries early in March). Jackson won big on super Tuesday in both 1984 and 1988. In 1988, there were four DLC members running for the Democratic nomination—Al Gore, Dick Gephardt, Bruce Babbitt, and Joe Biden. Jackson, with 7 million votes, won far more votes than all four combined.

The 1991 DLC conference contrasted itself to the Democratic party by focusing on its greater willingness to use military force, limit social spending, vigorously attack welfare, lessen its commitment to civil rights, support a fast track trade agreement with Mexico, and school choice. It was strongly challenged by Congressman Bill Gray (who was a vice-chairman of the DLC) as well as by Jesse Jackson for its position on civil rights. The group went out of its way to criticize quotas in a calculated political signal that placed it squarely with the George Bush who finally signed the much-weakened 1991 Civil Rights Act. Their position on civil rights—saying they are committed to equal opportunity but not equal results—is racist, since it implies that lack of equal results must be caused by inherent inferiority. Decades ago, Lyndon Baines Johnson made clear that equal results must be the measure of true equality of opportunity.

Now, in a presidential season without a Jackson candidacy, Bill Clinton, most recent past president of the DLC, and Al Gore, DLC member, comprise the Democratic ticket. The DLC has achieved its goal of taking over the 1992 presidential process. (However, they have not yet been able to substitute their agenda; they have

had to make some important concessions on platform, including calling for the rich and corporations to pay their fair share of taxes, protection against striker replacement, and support for public education.)

In dominating the Democratic ticket, the DLC's racial strategy moves beyond Michael Dukakis's defensive posture. They have more than taken the black vote (and the labor vote) for granted. Their strategy is clearly and expressly to compete for the white, suburban, "forgotten" middle class by aggressively using racial signals to attract these voters. They have gone on the offensive to try to isolate the nation's leading voice on racial equity and racial unity, Jesse Jackson.

What Are These Racial Signals?

In January of this year, with the entire primary season still ahead, the Gennifer Flowers scandal threatened to waylay the Clinton candidacy. To divert attention from that, he ignored pleas for mercy and allowed the execution of a lobotomized African-American man, Willie Ray Rector, who had an I.Q. of seventy, to show that he was tough on crime, tough on blacks, and to avoid the Willie Horton nightmare that haunted Dukakis.

In March, on the eve of the Georgia primary, Clinton orchestrated a photo opportunity at the Stone Mountain Correctional Facility, where he was backdropped by about forty black prisoners. *The New York Times* was among the newspapers that carried the photograph.[2]

Later in March, the Arkansas NAACP blasted Clinton for playing golf at an all-white country club. He had been doing so for eleven years.

When Los Angeles erupted in May after the Rodney King verdict and America was challenged to confront the rage and decay in our cities, Clinton did not offer a plan for addressing the urban crisis. Clinton provided leadership that was in the tradition of Dan Quayle. Quayle's response was to blame the rioters for the riot, the murderers for the murders. Clinton's contribution was to call for a stronger anticrime bill. In fact, Clinton tried to define some new political turf outside of the traditional left and right by saying that he could be both probusiness and proenvironment, probusiness and prolabor; he could be both pro–civil rights and tough on crime. He equates crime with color!

The Democrats and Republicans are competitive in their divisiveness.

Clinton insulted the National Newspaper Publishers Association by a last minute cancellation of a scheduled appearance before their June convention.

In June, when Clinton was invited to address the National Rainbow Coalition's "Rebuild America" conference, he chose to use that opportunity to "push off" Jackson and the Rainbow, with a cynical attack against young rap artist and community organizer, Sister Souljah.

The Rap on Souljah

Let us look at what really happened in the Sister Souljah situation. The Rainbow conference was a dynamic and, in many ways, ground-breaking conference that sought real solutions to problems of federal disinvestment, crime and drugs, racial divisions, and low voter participation. It brought together individuals and sectors of society that, if not for Jackson's unifying magic, would not even talk to each other.

Into this delicate political situation walked the candidate Bill Clinton. He criticized Sister Souljah for inciting blacks to kill whites, quoting her out-of-context from a *Washington Post* interview. He compared her to David Duke, and by implication, criticized the Rainbow for allowing her to participate in its youth empowerment session the previous evening. *Boston Globe* columnist Thomas Oliphant described it this way:

> Yes, she really did say in a long interview with the *Washington Post* after the LA riot: "If black people kill black people very day, why not have a week and kill white people."
>
> But I've read the transcript of the May 13 interview 10 times, and there is no doubt in my mind that she is reporting on—and reflecting—street-level rage, not advocating murder, which is the impression Clinton's selection of her most inflammatory words was designed to foster...
>
> Clinton took his shot in ignorance of why Jesse Jackson had Sister Souljah at the Rainbow's meeting . . .
>
> Say what you will about Jackson's political ego, no one can heal as he can when he puts his energy into it the way he has since the riot.[3]

Long after Clinton had been informed of the context and meaning of Souljah's comments, encouraged to talk directly with her, and informed of the context of her appearance at the Rainbow conference, he continued to say that he would stand against racism. As stated in an editorial that appeared in the *Boston Globe:*

> For a candidate desperately seeking to come from behind in the polls, the Rainbow meeting, and Souljah's participation, provided a perfect opportunity—not for courting members of his party's core constituency, but for kicking them to the curb.
>
> This was not about a little-known rap artist . . . This was about Clinton's efforts to impress conservative and moderate Democrats by proving he could stand up to Jackson.[4]

From the point of view of calculated political strategy, the Sister Souljah move by Clinton was brilliant. He turned truth on its head and won the admiration and praise of the white pundits and handlers. He successfully substituted symbol for substance, division and "push-off" for healing and inclusion, political calcula-

tion for vision. He falsely claimed the moral high ground on race, while actually being the voice of white resentment of black nationalism and resistance. He outdid Allan Bakke in his use of the reverse discrimination argument. He played to white fear of black violence without offering any solutions for the rage and alienation of our youth and our cities. He mobilized his national network to portray Jackson as a racist who refused to condemn the killing of white people, when Jackson is, in fact, the nation's most effective voice for a genuine alternative to racial hatred. The managers of the two previously failed Democratic presidential attempts—Susan Estrich (Dukakis) and Bob Beckel (Mondale)—were mobilized to publicly cheer Clinton on for his tough "handling" of the "Jackson problem" and to empathize with Clinton's difficult chore. He encouraged black leaders to line up against their own troubled youth in the name of taking a stand against racism. In this single incident, true to his white, southern, DLC roots, Clinton showed himself to be a masterful manipulator of all the time-honored techniques used against the oppressed.

Juan Gonzalez at the *New York Daily News* got it right when he said, "Move over, Willie Horton. Sister Souljah has arrived. This time, the election year 'Black Threat' drummed up to enrage and keep the races divided comes from the Democrats, not the Republicans."[5]

And the Beat Goes On

The Clinton-Gore post-Democratic National Convention bus tours have taken them to middle America, to areas where the only nonwhite face in the staged photo opportunities is that of a secret service agent. Clinton-Gore's first stop after the New York convention was Camden, New Jersey, a predominantly black and brown city, with an African-American mayor, city council president, police chief, school superintendent, and Democratic party chairman. The Clinton campaign informed the local leadership that they were holding a "private rally," and did not invite them to the all-white rally with a select group at G.E. Aerospace.

At least part of the story of the 1992 presidential election is the story of a continued and escalated retreat from racial equality and the manipulation of racial attitudes as a substitute for real change.

The Clinton inner circle is modelled after his exclusive white country club. Even those African-American leaders who joined the Clinton camp early, with few programs and promises for their constituencies, and who acted as willing voices in Clinton's anti-Jackson moves, have been "pushed off." The Clinton forces dangled carrots to sow divisions and rivalries, but then withdrew the carrots. An effort to get out the vote in the form of a proposal for black southern voter registration drafted by Mike Espy, John Lewis, and Bill Jefferson was submitted to the Clinton campaign and is being stonewalled. As DeWayne Wickham of *USA Today* described, "it seems the Arkansas governor cares less about exciting black voters—the Democratic party's most loyal constituency—than he does about inciting the white suburban and southern voters he hopes will help him reshape the party."[6]

The sum of the Clinton strategy is clear: to avoid minority audiences (except perhaps after sundown), to publicly slap Jesse Jackson to show toughness against minority aspirations, to launch no efforts to register and inspire a black or Latino vote, and thus signal the all-clear to the white Reagan Democrats to come home.

The scope of the conversation on race in presidential politics has moved to exclude a stand for racial justice.

The Republicans, of course, will not concede the territory of race and other divisive politics to the Democrats. In a draft of their party platform, they described Washington, D.C., as a "national disgrace," plagued by "hellish crime," "unremitting scandal," "illegal drugs," and "massive dependency." At the same time that Jesse Jackson's work on statehood for the District of Columbia has given the idea renewed life and possibility, the Republicans are calling for "rescuing the nation's capital" by increasing federal controls.

The Republican platform also won approval from Pat Buchanan for its toughness against illegal aliens with language that Buchanan said showed support for his campaign's call for building a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. The August Republican National Convention was a showcase of prejudice, intolerance, and negativity. Ronald Reagan's keynote speech showed that he has not lost his touch; he can still reach into white America and call them to a sense of racial superiority. The Democrats and Republicans are competitive in their divisiveness. The difference is that the Republicans are consolidating their base, while the Democrats are rejecting theirs.

Call the Nation to Higher Ground

At least part of the story of the 1992 presidential election is the story of a continued and escalated retreat from racial equality and the manipulation of racial attitudes as a substitute for real change.

While some would argue otherwise, I believe that on November 3, we need to elect Bill Clinton as president. On some essential points, he is significantly better than Bush. He supports fair taxes on the rich and corporations, statehood for Washington, D.C., same-day voter registration, protection against striker replacement, funding for education and preschool care, reproductive choice for women, equal rights for gays and lesbians, a reinvest-

ment package for America, environmental protection, and greater reductions in the military budget.

The American people desperately want and need change. They will be voting for fair taxes, jobs, and workers' rights. Working people who vote for Bill Clinton will do so not in support of his antilabor, right-to-work stance, but because they still see the Democrats as the party of working people, while Republicans are seen as the party of the rich. Minorities will vote for Bill Clinton not because they support his "push off" politics, but because they see differences between him and George Bush. People who care about the cities will vote for Clinton because he offered, albeit very late, a reinvestment plan that at least points us in the right direction. In this, the "year of the woman," women will vote for him because of his prochoice position.

The question about the labor, minority, and urban vote this year, as it was in the Bush/Dukakis race, is whether the message, agenda, and campaign strategy hit close enough to people's needs and hopes that they will vote in sufficient numbers. The primaries would suggest that they may not. We lost 4.5 million voters between the 1988 and 1992 presidential primaries. Voter turnout was down by 13.3 percent. Black voter turnout in some states was down by as much as 60 to 70 percent.

Will some people be voting for Clinton in response to his race signals? Undoubtedly, Clinton will be well rewarded for his manipulation of racial fears.

That is the strategic dilemma for voters this election. The scope of the conversation on race in presidential politics has moved to exclude a stand for racial justice. At a time when the nonwhite population has grown tremendously, with African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and native Americans now 25 percent of the population, the political discourse is moving rapidly to ostracize minorities. Not only is there a narrowing of the political turf to the fight for and therefore the exclusive concerns of white, suburban, middle-class voters. We have been made into political albatrosses, special interests, criminals, and parasites.

We must determine now to strategize and organize to break out of the prison in which we now find ourselves.

In the aftermath of the 1984 and 1988 Jackson presidential races, there have been tremendous electoral gains for blacks, Latinos, Asians, and progressives—from Maine to Mississippi, from New York City to North Carolina, and from Minnesota to California. There is a ground swell for empowerment and democracy throughout the country. This year, the number of black and Latino representatives in the U.S. House of Representatives may increase by as much as 50 percent. In the twenty-seven years since the Voting Rights Act, the number of black elected officials has grown from 400 to almost 7,500 (still only 1 percent of the elected officials in the country). Asians are running for and winning office for the first time in many places. In communities, campuses, and workplaces across the country, people are organizing for change. These are building blocks for a national movement.

The historic opportunity for change exists. With the end of the Cold War, the nation's resources can now be directed to domestic economic development. There is massive discontent with the existing social, economic, and political situation. But this discontent can be pulled to the left or right. David Duke, Pat Buchanan, George Bush, and Bill Clinton offer only one vision of society—one in which white racism and white superiority are givens. This can only lead to increased polarization and suffering. There is another option—the one offered by Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition.

This other tension in American politics is one that calls us to higher ground. Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition have called the nation to "turn pain into power and pain into partnership, rather than pain into polarization." During the height of Reagan's popularity, Jackson stood with family farmers, striking workers, struggling students, and environmentally endangered communities. He reached deep into people's striving for justice and decency, showed us the common thread that unites us all, and made us believe that through struggle and coalition, we could change the course of the nation.

This message won 2.5 million white votes. This work has shown that there is an alternative to mainstream, racially divisive politics. It is possible to rally people around a moral center, based on a belief in principles and values higher than crass political calculation. Through shared goals and shared struggle, we can achieve common ground. This view challenges the very foundation of American politics and race relations today. For this view to win, it will require an expansive, inclusive vision, a plan that corresponds to the scope of the nation's problems. It requires a commitment to long-term organizing from the bottom up and the building of a strong grassroots movement in each of our communities. Let us commit to work at this goal with the urgency and intensity that circumstances and history require of us.

Notes

[1]*Polling Report* 8, no. 13 (6 July 1992).

[2]*New York Times*, 3 March 1992.

[3]Thomas Oliphant, "The Right Way–and the Wrong Way," *Boston Globe*, 17 June 1992.

[4]Editorial, *Boston Globe*, 19 June 1992.

[5]Juan Gonzalez, "Bill Hits Low Note in Rap of Souljah," *New York Daily News*, 17 June 1992.

[6]DeWayne Wickham, "Bill Clinton's Black-Vote High-Wire Act: Can He Court Reagan Democrats and a Big Black Turnout?," *USA Today*, 31 August 1992.

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Black Women and the American Political System

by
Dorothy A. Clark

Black women and politics—it is an association rarely made by the American electorate. As a group, black women have never been prominent players in the nation's political arena. In a system of decision making and power holding designed and dominated by white men, black women are an alien group in the formal political process. Their participation in that process has been limited—indeed often blocked—by a hierarchical system of race, gender, and class oppression that relegates black women to the lowest rungs of the political power ladder.

America appears to be entering a new age of politics for women, one that also suggests a change in the status of black women in the system. A growing number of black women are vying for elective office, including national legislative seats. Twenty-one black women are seeking election to the House of Representatives in this election. The increase can be attributed partly to the new geography of the congressional landscape, redrawn on the basis of population changes to create twelve new black legislative districts.[1]

According to David Bositis, political analyst with the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies in Washington, D.C., "Trends are up substantially for women and black candidates . . . [creating] an ideal set of circumstances for the election of black females."[2]

There are currently 435 seats in the House of Representatives, 26 of which are held by blacks, 4 of them women. If voters turn this "ideal set of circumstances" into reality, it is possible that five or six more black women may claim seats in the House.

The Illinois Senate Race

Currently, none of the one hundred seats in the U. S. Senate are held by blacks, but that too could change if Illinois Democrat Carol Moseley Braun is elected. Braun won an upset victory in the March Democratic primary, defeating two other contenders to win the party's candidacy. One of them was two-term incumbent Alan Dixon, whose vote to confirm the much-contested nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court rankled many constituents. Braun's Republican opponent in the race for the Senate seat is attorney Richard Williamson, whose well-connected political career includes stints as adviser to presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush. Of course, Braun is no newcomer to politics and government either, having served in the Illinois legislature and currently holding the post of recorder of deeds for Cook County. If she wins this closely watched race for the U.S. Senate, Braun will become the third black ever elected to this legislative body. The first was Hiram Revels of Mississippi, who served from 1870 to 1871. The second, Edward Brooke of Massachusetts, served from 1966 to 1978. A victory for Braun would also mean that she would become the country's first black female senator.

Would such a victory signify the elevation of black women's political status, or would it represent another "black first," one of those historic milestones that contributes more to a sense of racial pride than to effecting fundamental change? Bositis assesses Braun's advance as an important inroad that holds substantial promise for changing policy, especially if she shares her newfound status with white women.[3]

Amazement and jubilation were the responses to Braun's win in the primary; such an impressive breakthrough by a black woman had not been anticipated. The search for reasons to explain her political success began with the question of who voted for her and why. She received the almost obligatory majority of the state's black vote, 82 percent. Statistics also reveal that Braun garnered 26 percent of the white vote and 40 percent of the women's vote.[4]

America appears to be entering a new age of politics for women, one that also suggests a change in the status of black women in the system.

Political pundits and the media cite voters' exasperation with incumbents, a mood that has seemed to overtake the nation, as one factor that helped foster a climate amenable to Braun's aspirations. Particularly in regard to women, they report that exasperation churned into outrage with the controversy fomented by allegations of

sexual harassment against Thomas during his confirmation process.[5] The claims made by University of Oklahoma law professor Anita Hill and the Senate's handling of the matter and subsequent approval of Thomas for the Supreme Court galvanized women to assert themselves more forcefully in the political process.

Black and White Feminism

But, this newly mobilized phalanx as depicted in the media is composed of primarily white women. The Thomas-Hill matter and the highly charged nature of gender politics it uncovered has shown no signs of fostering any sort of coalition between black and white women in the political arena. White women, brandishing the Thomas-Hill issue, have moved to elbow their male counterparts aside to gain greater access to the political system. For instance, in her run for a U.S. Senate seat, one-time Democratic vice-presidential hopeful Geraldine Ferraro of New York used the example of Anita Hill in a television campaign advertisement to wage her battle against her opponents—Republican incumbent Al D'Amato and two other Democrats contending for the party's nomination, State Attorney General Bob Abrams and New York City Comptroller Liz Holtzman.

The ad, which shows a photograph of Hill, states that just as Republican senators and others engineered a "blistering smear campaign to discredit" Hill, similar forces had lined up against Ferraro to cast aspersions on her business dealings. "A year ago, a woman fighting for change was smeared. Don't let it happen again," the ad said.[6] The campaign skirmish became all the more curious when Holtzman used Hill to counterattack Ferraro. "One difference between Anita Hill and Gerry Ferraro: Anita Hill came forward and told the truth," Holtzman's subsequent television ad stated.[7]

The Thomas-Hill controversy, played out as it was in the media, caused much consternation among blacks. Yet, it appears that for blacks, the issue has not served as the same type of political ammunition that it has for whites. Notably, black women have not employed the controversy to oppose their male counterparts in the political sphere, where traditionally they have had a marginal presence. It may be argued that this has not occurred simply because black men do not dominate decision making and power holding in politics. While this could be a factor, it does not adequately explain why the plight of Anita Hill seems to be more of a rallying point against the patriarchal order for white women than for black women.

White feminists tend to see themselves as being in conflict with men, and the tawdry farce into which Thomas's confirmation hearing degenerated exacerbated this conflict. There is, however, a different perception of this battle of the sexes among black women, who along with black men must contend with racism. Historically, black women have found that while they must battle discrimination based on both gender and skin color, the struggle for racial parity has often taken precedence over that of gender equality. It would be futile for black women to fight for equal rights as women while their rights as people of color are denied. Gender equality would mean nothing to black women without the eradication of racial oppression. The contemporary white feminist movement tends to exhibit a lack of understanding of this fundamental difference in black women's experience. As a result, black women have been alienated not from feminist concerns, but from the movement.

According to sociologist Vivian Gordon, contemporary white feminists presume that black males hold positions of power equal to white males and thus "often attempt to impose upon black women a definition for black male/female relationships based upon their perspectives which identify all men as the enemy."[8] Black women, however, have not accepted this aspect of feminist ideology which could promote gender divisions that would weaken the black liberation struggle. "Black women continue to insist that their own emancipation cannot be separated from the emancipation of the total African-American community," says Gordon. "Primarily, such women view themselves to be copartners with black men in the struggle against oppression by defining liberation to include freedom from all forms of oppression, including sexism."[9]

The fact that the Thomas-Hill issue has failed to promote the growth of political solidarity among black and white women is far from surprising, given the long history of uneasy politics between these two groups. White women of the antebellum South saw no similarities between their own subjugation and the treatment of enslaved black women and thus were participants in the oppression of black women. In the North, white female abolitionists frequently barred black women from joining their organizations. Later the suffragists, many of whom had been abolitionists, excluded black women from their movement to acquire voting rights, incensed that the Fifteenth Amendment extended the franchise to black men and not white women. The modern feminist movement, as well, has had an antagonistic relationship with women of color because its white, middle-class perspective has had little currency for women whose standpoint is not grounded in that ideology. While the effects of oppression experienced by white women cannot be dismissed or minimized, it is crucial to recognize and acknowledge that their oppression is not compounded by racism.

The Thomas-Hill matter and the highly charged nature of gender politics it uncovered has shown no signs of fostering any sort of coalition between black and white women in the political arena.

White women, as a group, have a degree of recognition as viable participants in the nation's political system that black women do not. The oppressive triumvirate of racism, sexism, and classism has totally eclipsed this group on America's political horizon. Note how black women are obscured in the demographic percentages tallied to study Braun's victory in the Illinois primary. Are they to be counted among the black vote or the women's vote? The face of the black vote is most likely male, while that of the women's vote is white. Where, then, does this leave black women?

A Black Woman's Place

For a brief but peculiar moment, black women did begin to figure prominently in the politics of the 1992 presidential campaign. The Democratic and Republican parties, abetted by the media, invoked a stereotypical image of the "bad" black woman and attempted to put her back in her "place."

First, Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton targeted rap artist-activist Sister Souljah, labelling her a racially divisive force in the nation and protesting her participation in a Rainbow Coalition event in Washington, D.C. He based his assessment on remarks Sister Souljah made in an interview conducted after the Los Angeles riots, to explain the mentality of gangs who perpetrate violence. Clinton, incensed at her suggestion that the violence that has taken so many black lives would eventually begin to claim white ones, chastised her for promoting discord between the races. Sister Souljah, who has been active mainly in the New York area, was not nationally known until Clinton tried to silence her by making her an example of an undesirable—and outspoken—black woman whom America did not need.

Clinton and Quayle, two privileged males at the center of America's white-dominated, patriarchal political system, chose to inject black women into the presidential campaign in a highly charged, negative way.

The Republicans launched a similar offensive with Vice-President Dan Quayle's scolding of U.S. Representative Maxine Waters, a Democrat from California. Quayle demanded that Waters apologize for, in his interpretation, calling President Bush a racist after her comments that the president was unconcerned with black Americans.

Both incidents displayed the arrogance with which the dominant culture tends to respond to blacks who do not speak in ways that appease whites. Neither Sister Souljah nor Waters acquiesced to their critics. Clinton and Quayle, two privileged males at the center of America's white-dominated, patriarchal political system, chose to inject black women into the presidential campaign in a highly charged, negative way. Their criticism implied that black people, not white racism, are responsible for the persistence of America's "race problem."

A History of Black Activism

Despite the current focus on women advancing to the fore in American politics, black women continue to be largely excluded from the formal political process. This exclusion, however, does not signify a lack of activism on the part of black women. Theirs has been a vital activism, exercised in a variety of ways and at various levels, but always central to the empowerment of black people. History is replete with accounts of black women who, individually and as a group, of necessity have defined ways particular to their status and condition in the struggle for freedom. Their efforts have resulted in large and small successes for black people in America.

The experience of black women in the United States is not one of an apolitical or uninvolved presence. Nearly three decades ago, author Edward T. Clayton noted that black women traditionally outnumbered black men in "performing the grassroots tasks necessary to political success," adding that, "The Negro woman has been the mainstay of the Negro man in politics almost since the post–Civil War South."[10] Although Clayton sees the role of black women as primarily a supportive one, they nevertheless had a significant impact on their communities.

Highly notable is Mary McLeod Bethune, an adviser to presidents Herbert Hoover, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Harry Truman. Bethune was especially influential in the Roosevelt administration, the only woman appointed to his "Black Cabinet." As a key member of Roosevelt's "Black Braintrusters," Bethune used her directorship of the Negro Division of the National Youth Administration to establish a strong advocacy base at the federal level for blacks, particularly women and youth.

The record goes back much further, to all the black women who resisted and defied the system of slavery. It includes Maria W. Stewart, who is considered America's first black female political writer, and Mary Ann Shadd Cary, who migrated to Canada where she became the first black woman newspaper editor in North America. Sojourner Truth, who via her now-famous question, "Ain't I a woman?," declared that although black females neither fit the mold of the feminine ideal crafted for their white counterparts nor were afforded any of its benefits, they were not devoid of womanhood or humanity. There were the women who in the late 1800s mobilized to form the black Women's Club Movement. The intrepid Ida B. Wells Barnett commanded international support for the antilynching campaign she spearheaded to combat the brutal mob murders of black men and women. Indeed, masses of black women have made vast contributions in the struggle against oppression through family, community, the educational system, the arts, politics—in all spheres of American life. And their work has gone largely unacknowledged.

The Dawning of a New Era

Is the American political system becoming more inclusive of and responsive to black women? The fact that black women are seeking elective office is evidence of marked advancement. However, their inclusion cannot even be called gradual—it is occasional.

Amid the excitement and wonder over the dawning of a new era in politics for women, the general exclusion of black women from the formal process persists. This is reflective of the status assigned to them by mainstream American society. By their resistance to this, as well as to the overall program of white supremacist oppression, black women have forged a tradition of empowerment activism. Because it seeks to break the monopoly of white control over societal arrangements, empowerment activism is adversary to mainstream political functions.

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A more critical question is this: Can the American political system, one of the pillars of a society stratified by racism, sexism, and classism, accommodate the presence of black women? If mere accommodation were the goal, the onus would no doubt be placed upon black women and their presence would likely be a dim one. The existing political framework was not intended for the full participation of any group other than the one which dominates it. Only when this framework is dismantled, or at the least, undergoes substantial ideological restructuring, will it allow for the equitable representation of the nation's disenfranchised citizens. In the meantime, masses of black women will continue their tradition of activism, though still largely unacknowledged.

Notes

[1]Representation in the U.S. House of Representatives is based on population. Congressional districts are redrawn every ten years on the basis of changes recorded by the federal census. Amendments made in 1982 to the Voting Rights Act require that legislative districts be redrawn so as not to dilute black voting power.

[2]David Bositis, telephone interview with the author, 4 June 1992.

[3]Ibid.

[4]*Emerge*, June 1992, 9.

[5]Ibid., *Ebony*, June 1992, 121. Reports on voter dissatisfaction with incumbents also dominated mainstream news outlets.

[6]Associated Press, 27 August 1992.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Vivian Gordon, *Black Women, Feminism, and Black Liberation: Which Way?* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1987), 27.

[9]Ibid., 56.

[10]Edward T. Clayton, *The Negro Politician: His Success and Failure* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., Inc., 1964), 122–123.

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(continued from page 10)

A Historic Moment: Black Voters and the 1992 Presidential Race
by Clarence Lausane

[14]Ron Walters, "Clinton's Gall," *Washington Post*, 16 June 1992.

[15]Robin Toner, "The 1992 Campaign Strategy: Perot Makes Major Parties Do Some Major Rethinking," *New York Times*, 4 June 1992.

[16]Ron Walters, *Black Presidential Politics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), 37.

[17]Ibid, 28.

[18]Barbara Reynolds, "Without the Black Vote, Party's Over for Democrats," *USA Today*, 13 March 1992.

[19]Gary Maloney, ed., *The Almanac of 1988 Presidential Politics* (Falls Church, VA: The American Political Network, 1989), 34.

[20]Richard Benedetto, "Perot Attracts Support From Swing Voters," *USA Today*, 17 June 1992.

[21]Clarence Lusane, "Souljah Story," *Black Political Agenda '92*, June 1992, 6.

[22]William Schneider, "The Suburban Century Begins," *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1992, 33–44.

[23]Richard Benedetto, "Perot Vote Tilts to Clinton," *USA Today*, 20 July 1992.

[24]Kathleen Quinn, "If Perot Were Black," *New York Times*, 11 June 1992.

[25]Michael Isikoff, "Perot's Rhetorical Drug War Raises Questions," *Washington Post*, 9 June 1992; and Frank Snepp, "Ross Perot's Private War on Drugs," *Village Voice*, 9 June 1992, 25–28.

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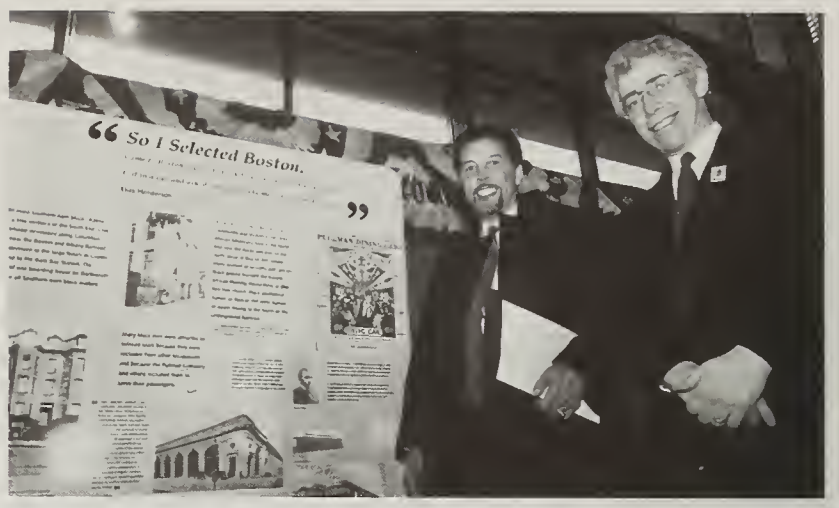
A. Philip Randolph and Boston's African-American Railroad Worker

by
James R. Green and
Robert C. Hayden



Robert C. Hayden (left) and James R. Green at unveiling of railroad worker panels at Back Bay Station.

On October 8, 1988, a group of retired Pullman car porters and dining car waiters gathered in Boston's Back Bay Station for the unveiling of a larger-than-life statue of A. Philip Randolph. During the 1920s and 1930s, Randolph was a pioneering black labor leader who led the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. He came to be considered the "father of the modern civil rights movement" as a result of his efforts to desegregate World War II defense jobs and the military services. Randolph's importance as a militant leader is highlighted by a quote inscribed on the base of the statue which reads, in part: "Freedom is never granted; it is won. Justice is never given; it is exacted."

The contributions of former railroad workers to the railroad industry and to the black community were acknowledged at the unveiling ceremony by a number of speakers, including State Representative Byron Rushing who was instrumental in securing funding from the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) for the statue of Randolph by artist Tina Allen.

...any understanding of the evolution of black urban politics must consider Randolph's enormous influence.

There are few statues of public figures in Boston as impressive as Allen's interpretation of Randolph. There are, in fact, no other statues of labor or civil rights leaders anywhere in the city. Attempts to convince city officials to erect a statue of William Monroe Trotter have been unsuccessful. The Randolph statue is unique, therefore, not only as art, but as an inspirational public monument for present and future generations. As Representative Rushing remarked at the unveiling, "We are turning this space into more than a waiting room—we are turning this space into an education room. . . ."[1]

As an extension of the Randolph statue project, we were asked by the MBTA Construction Department to conduct an oral history project of black railroad workers and to work with designers and architects to produce panels of text and photographs in the Back Bay Station highlighting the history, experiences, and accomplishments of blacks in the railroad industry and in the community. Thirty-one men and one woman were interviewed for the project. The transcriptions of those interviews have been placed in the Healey Library archives of the University of Massachusetts at Boston. On February 27, 1991, the panels were unveiled in a ceremony at Back Bay Station attended by Governor William Weld, Secretary of Transportation Richard Taylor, and Representative Rushing, again an influential force in helping to secure funding from the MBTA.[2]

The interviews contain insights into several important yet neglected areas of African-American history. Although Boston's black community has been the subject of many fine historical studies, its working-class population has not been extensively researched. Our interviews reveal a great deal about the working lives of black railroad workers, their living conditions on long road trips, and their family and community roles. The interviews contain a powerful statement about the black work ethic, highlighting the sense of style and craft the porters and waiters brought to the railroads as well as how they dealt with race discrimination on the job and in the cities they visited.[3]

Trade Unionism and the Black Worker

The interviews also illuminate a previously neglected area of experience: the meaning of trade unionism to black workers, not only in material terms, but in wider political terms, as well. Our interviews complement the recent historical scholarship on Randolph and the Brotherhood which includes a monograph, a documentary film, a microfilmed edition of the union's papers, and two important biographies of Randolph.[4] While this work has vastly expanded our knowledge of Randolph and the Brotherhood, the meaning of trade unionism to rank-and-file porters has not been fully examined.

In the texts available on the history of Boston's African-American community, there is little information on the small group of black workers who belonged to unions before the Depression, including porters, musicians, and members of the Colored Waiters Alliance. An even larger number of workers in the late 1930s and 1940s joined all-black unions on the railroads, worked as tunnel diggers in the "sand hog" union affiliated with

the Laborers' International Union of America, or became active in the militant new unions affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).[5] Their history has also been largely neglected.

The interviews we recorded begin to fill in this gap. They include valuable comments about trade union experience from men like George Walker of Marlboro, Massachusetts. He recalled that "when I went to work for the Pullman Company in 1924 working on the Boston-Chicago overnight train—the Wolverine—every other person you came into contact with on the railroad was organized."[6] The other unions, like most that were affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL), excluded workers of color *defacto or de jure*.[7] This pattern of discrimination was so pervasive that historians, until recently, have paid little attention to those exceptional unions in which blacks organized themselves or in which blacks were seen by whites as "indispensable allies" and included fully as union members.[8]

In Walker's interview, one of the most valuable in the collection, he recalls his experiences in the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters: "When I first started we had no organization," Walker remembers. "And a year later we started to organize. But if the company found out you were joining the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, they'd fire you. The union started in 1925. I joined it in '25."[9] Walker kept his job and went on to fulfill a long career.[10] When he retired after several decades of faithful service, Walker received a citation from the Brotherhood which reads: "In the judgement of the officers and members of our great movement, you have fought a good fight, kept the faith, and finished your course in the employment of your craft . . . as a good porter, with trade union distinction . . ." The citation appears on one of the Back Bay Station panels along with a photograph of the late George Walker as a porter.

The Brotherhood also gave them a living wage, which, though not a wage equal to that of white workers, nonetheless provided a steady income that made them some of the best breadwinners in the black community. "Working on the trains was what helped me educate my family,"[11] said Bennie Bullock of Mattapan who credits Randolph and the Brotherhood with allowing him to send three children through college and on to professional careers. Other porters tell the same story.

By World War II, the Brotherhood had cut back the horribly long hours porters toiled and had increased their wages dramatically. When workers like George Walker first joined the union in the mid-1920s, porters earned only $67.00 per month (for 240 hours!). But, in the union's first contract with the Pullman Company in 1937, wages were increased to $89.50 per month and by the end of World War II, porters were earning $175.00 per week, not including tips. So, in the 1940s a union porter's job became a very desirable occupation in the black community.

The interviews offer a few interesting comments on A. Philip Randolph who turned railroad job segregation into a base for organizing the most powerful all-black working-class organization in America after Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association. To Randolph, the Brotherhood's work was class conscious as well as race conscious. He chose to work within the American Federation of Labor, even though many of its affiliates actively excluded black workers, most notably the other railroad brotherhoods. This controversial position, along with his unpopular decision to call off the 1928 Pullman porter strike at the suggestion of the AFL president, led to sharp criticism of Randolph's politics and his brand of nationalism.[12]

The Leadership of Randolph

The workers who spoke to us about Randolph praised him as a courageous labor and civil rights leader. They reminded us that during the late 1930s and 1940s, Randolph was the most important black political leader in the United States with a large following in the growing ranks of African-American blue-collar workers. They also reminded us that any understanding of the evolution of black urban politics must consider Randolph's enormous influence. Like William Monroe Trotter, he was a man of action who believed in civil disobedience and other forms of direct confrontation. He was also a socialist who parted company with many civil rights leaders in emphasizing the power of the black working class and in seeking out alliances with the white working class.

Randolph's politics derived from an earlier form of black radicalism – a race-conscious form of socialism.

With one exception, the workers we interviewed did not seem to share Randolph's explicitly socialist views. They were, however, part of a body of political opinion in the black community that was at odds with Booker T. Washington's brand of self-help; and it was Randolph who was most articulate in expressing this political belief. As employees oppressed by Pullman's paternalism, the porters were drawn much more to Randolph's militancy and independence, and even to his insistence on seeking alliances with organized white workers, than they were to Washington's strategy of seeking alliances with paternalist white employers like Pullman.

Most porters in Boston were moderate or even conservative in their political views. Some were undoubtedly Republicans who eventually followed the South End political activists Silas "Shag" Taylor and his brother Balcolm Taylor into the Democratic party in the 1930s. George Walker explained in his interview that "'Shag' Taylor had more to do with organizing us than anyone else," adding that "A lot of porters used to go to the back room of his [Lincoln] drug store on Tremont Street. He was one of the people who got us interested in A. Philip

Randolph." Walker explained, "See, everybody says A. Philip Randolph started to organize us. Well, he didn't start to organize us. We got him. Most of the organizing was done by the porters themselves."[13] This fascinating insight suggests that Randolph, who was not as skilled an organizer as he was a speaker, played only a small role in the Boston porters' grassroots organizing efforts.

Black Empowerment: The Case of Local 370

Our research was not limited to those who joined the Brotherhood and followed Randolph. One of the real discoveries involves the role of another group of neglected black union workers—the dining car waiters. Their union, Dining Car Waiters Local 370, is little known and certainly deserves further study, both locally and nationally. Affiliated with the Hotel and Restaurant Workers, it claimed many more Boston members than the Brotherhood. The dining car waiters fought for union recognition in the decade after the Brotherhood won its first contract from Pullman in 1937. "When I started working on the Colonial to Washington in the 1930s we made $13.00 a week," said dining car waiter Altamont Bolt. "Everything changed after World War II. When I came back out of the service in 1945, we had a union, Local 370, and they fought for us very well. When I left the railroad I was making a hundred and a quarter a week. That was *very good money* to me! *Very* good money."[14] When he left the railroad a little later in the 1950s Winston Prescod said in his interview, "the highest paid waiters in the world were railroad waiters."[15]

The Dining Car Waiters union was led by George Johnson and Willard Chandler, two of our most informa-

Randolph's union was an embodiment of black power in action, but his overall political strategy sought alliances with the organized white working class.

tive interviewees. They initiated the effort in the late 1950s to desegregate the cafeteria cars which were staffed exclusively with white waitresses. Chandler, now a well-known chef with a restaurant near the Back Bay Station, recalls how the union helped make him a leader. "I graduated from Cambridge Rindge and Latin in 1937 (the year of the great Brotherhood victory over Pullman) and when I'd been with the union for about four years, I went to Suffolk Law School. They told me . . . I knew more than the teacher about labor law. When I became head of the union . . . I had to do all of the negotiating and the court hearings myself. I learned this by doing it. And I became an expert on it."[16]

As the business manager of Local 370, Chandler tried to protect members who had suffered the kinds of discrimination all black workers faced. Chico Holmes explained in an interview that the local gave him more power. If a white boss wanted to replace him with a crony he would be "in trouble with the union." Chandler could get him his job back with back pay. "Old Chandler was skillful . . . ," Holmes remembered. "He could push one of them cats into a corner and make him sweat."[17]

The African-American railroad worker interviews in the Healey Library reveal a variety of experiences that led to empowerment: the personal empowerment of a black worker like Chico Holmes who had support from the union in standing up to a discriminatory boss, or a labor leader like Willard Chandler whose advocacy for black workers led to self-education and civil rights accomplishments.

From Local Activism to National Politics

In some ways, of course, this kind of personal empowerment was also political. Porters active in the Brotherhood also became civil rights leaders. They were the cadre who made a national movement out of Randolph's threat to march on Washington, D.C., in the spring of 1941 to force President Roosevelt to issue an order to desegregate defense industry jobs. The most famous example is that of E. D. Nixon who led the Brotherhood activities in Montgomery, Alabama, and later, as head of the Montgomery NAACP chapter, worked with Rosa Parks and others to organize the Montgomery bus boycott.[18]

There is also evidence of similar, though less dramatic, civil rights activity in our interviews. The leaders of the Dining Car Waiters Union in Boston made important efforts to desegregate railroad jobs. Willard Chandler brought one of the first cases involving black workers to the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination and helped desegregate one group of all-white railroad jobs. Lewis Wade, a Pullman car porter and Brotherhood member who was inspired by A. Philip Randolph's efforts to desegregate defense jobs and the military in the 1940s, tells this story:

> We used to eat at places designated for porters. I remember one time when I was "running to Washington." I went to a place not far from the station where the porters used to eat breakfast. President Truman had just signed a bill that said nowhere in the city of Washington could there be any discrimination. So I went in there one morning and sat down at the bar where they served breakfast. And the fellow said, "You can't sit there." I says, "Why not?" He said, "We don't allow colored people to sit there." I told him about Truman's bill about this kind of discrimination and that raised quite a ruckus with all the porters in there. Anyway, after that we ate at the counter.[19]

Other interviewees speak of being moved by the 1963 march on Washington organized by Randolph and his associate Bayard Rustin. One of the marchers from Boston was Philip O. Baker, a Pullman car cleaner. As he recalled: "I was in Washington and my family was there too on the day that A. Philip Randolph . . . created

that march for jobs. We spent a day there listening to everything that went on. We were with so many different people of so many different cultures. It's just one of those things you were proud to have been a part of. The man was a pioneer. More like him would make it a better world for us."[20]

Interviewees like Baker remind us of what Randolph meant to African Americans as a working-class and civil rights leader. He was, of course, overshadowed by Dr. Martin Luther King whose *I Have a Dream* speech eclipsed Randolph's own great address to the 200,000 at the Lincoln Memorial. And later in the 1960s Randolph's leadership was sharply criticized by a more militant generation of black activists. For example, Randolph's willingness to work for so many years within the AFL-CIO when many of its affiliates openly discriminated against blacks made little sense to an angry new generation of activists.

Our interviews remind us that Randolph's politics derived from an earlier form of black radicalism—a race-conscious form of socialism. Randolph's union was an embodiment of black power in action, but his overall political strategy sought alliances with the organized white working class. His radicalism was tempered by the need to deal with powerful white-dominated institutions like the AFL-CIO and the Democratic party. He never apologized for his pragmatism and explained that his politics determined the fate of thousands of black workers whose families depended on the effectiveness of the Brotherhood as an economic and political organization.

We believe our interviews help put Randolph's work in the context of ordinary workers' lives. They certainly affirm the importance of Randolph as an economic and political leader, as a civil rights pioneer who richly deserves the acknowledgement of a statue erected in his honor at Boston's Back Bay Station. But these interviews also show that Randolph's movement was composed of rank-and-file workers of many political persuasions, people who also deserve recognition—recognition they now receive in the six historical panels that lead to the Randolph statue in Back Bay Station.

Notes

[1]Peter J. Howe, "Recalling a Civil Rights Pioneer," *Boston Globe*, 9 October 1988, 33.

[2]Matthew Brelis, "Back Bay Station Pays Tribute to a Man and a Time," *Boston Globe*, 28 February 1991, 32. We have prepared a pamphlet about the panels featuring many of the photographs from the Back Bay project. "Knights of the Rail: A. Philip Randolph and Boston's African-American Railroad Worker" is available from RCH Associates, P.O. Box 5453, Boston, MA 02102.

[3]The richest body of information in the interviews concerns the porters' occupational life and culture of solidarity. For an exploratory look at his kind of history, see Bernard Mergen, "The Pullman Porter: From 'George' to Brotherhood," *3.South Atlantic Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (1974).

[4]The definitive work on the Brotherhood is William H. Harris, *Keeping the Faith: A. Philip Randolph, Milton Webster, and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters*, 1925–37 (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1977). The eighty-three-minute documentary film, "Miles of Smiles, Years of Struggle," is available on videotape for rent ($75.00) or sale ($195.00) from Resolution, Inc., 149 Ninth Street, Room 420, San Francisco, CA 94103. The oral history interviews used in the film have been expanded into a book by Jack Santino, *Miles of Smiles, Years of Struggle: Stories of Black Pullman Porters* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989). The records of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, archived at the Newberry Library in Chicago and the Chicago Historical Society are available on microfilm from University Publications of America, as are the papers of A. Philip Randolph. Jervis Anderson has written an outstanding biography, *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1973). A more recent study which traces Randolph's civil-rights career is Paula F. Pfeffer, *A. Philip Randolph: Pioneer of the Civil-Rights Movement* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1990).

[5]The black waiters and musicians unions are mentioned in James R. Green and Hugh Carter Donahue, *Boston's Workers: A Labor History* (Boston: Boston Public Library, 1979), 105. On the predominantly black "sand hog" Local 88 which joined the Laborers in 1935, see Bill Fletcher, Jr. and Peter Agard, *The Indispensable Ally: Black Workers and the Formation of the Congress of Industrial Unions*, 1934–1941 (Boston: William Monroe Trotter Institute, 1987), 18. Although relatively few Boston blacks joined the new CIO unions (which were not as strong in this city as in more industrialized areas), they were active as members and leaders in the Packing House Workers Union, Local 11, and later Local 616, which represented African-Americans employed at the Revere Sugar Works as well as the packing houses. See Jim Bollen and Jim Green, "The Long Strike: The Practice of Solidarity Among Boston's Packinghouse Workers," in Kenneth Fones-Wolf and Martin Kaufman, eds., *Labor in Massachusetts: Selected Essays* (Westfield, MA: Institute for Massachusetts Studies, Westfield State College, 1990), 233–257. Some of the papers of Local 11 are archived in the Healey Library, University of Massachusetts at Boston.

[6]Walker interview, The Robert C. Hayden Transcripts of Oral History Interviews with Boston African-American Railroad Workers, 1977–1991, University of Massachusetts at Boston, Archives and Special Collections Department (hereafter cited as Hayden Transcripts).

[7]See Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619–1973* (New York: International, 1973), and James R. Green, *The World of the Worker: Labor in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1980).

[8]Ibid. See Fletcher and Agard, *The Indispensable Ally*. An excellent example of a community study of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters is Greg LeRoy, "The Founding Heart of A. Philip Randolph's Union: Milton P. Webster and Chicago's Pullman Porters Organize, 1925–1937," *Labor's Heritage* 3, no. 3 (July 1991): 22–43.

[9]Walker interview, Hayden Transcripts.

[10]Others were not so fortunate. Benjamin Mays, for example, recalls in his autobiography that when he worked as a porter out of Boston while attending Bates College, he was fired after a dispute with a white conductor. He had also been involved in written complaints about working conditions and job assignments to the main office in Chicago. "... Since I was the only college man in the group the Pullman officials immediately suspected me of initiating the appeal to Chicago," he wrote. See Benjamin Mays, *Born to Rebel: The Autobiography of Benjamin Mays* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 61–62.

[11]Bullock interview, Hayden Transcripts.

[12]For a critical interpretation see Manning Marable, "A. Philip Randolph and the Foundations of Black American Socialism," in James Green, ed., *Workers' Struggles, Past & Present: A 'Radical America' Reader* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 209–233.

[13]Walker interview, Hayden Transcripts.

[14]Bolt interview, Hayden Transcripts.

[15]Prescod interview, Hayden Transcripts.

[16]Chandler interview, Hayden Transcripts.

[17]Holmes interview, Hayden Transcripts.

[18]For an interview with E. D. Nixon, see Howell Raines, *My Soul Is Rested: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement in the Deep South* (New York: Penguin, 1983), 37–39, 43–51.

[19]Wade interview, Hayden Transcripts.

[20]Baker interview, Hayden Transcripts.

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Voting Policy and Voter Participation: The Legacy of the 1980s

by
Alex Willingham

It has been widely recognized, at least since the Selma march during the civil rights movement, that the interests of black citizens and other minorities are directly connected to their capacity to participate in the political process and to public policies that protect that option. The clear message of the Selma demonstration was that, for a people constrained by a broad range of oppressive racist structures, voting is a basic resource for protecting all other rights. Further, it was clear that those who control power will restrict access to the ballot as their main line of defense.[1]

Today, no doubt, we are less sanguine about the significance of electoral campaigns given the persistence of so many problems. Black communities continue to face severely restricted economic opportunities and there has been resegregation, in effect, of public school education. Public channels can be woefully ineffective as seen in the Rodney King verdict and the reaction in Los Angeles. Still, the messages of Selma ring true when we think about what will be necessary to bring real change under the conditions of the 1990s.

It is especially important to think about current trends as we approach the 1992 elections and anticipate the form that political struggle will take in the coming decade. Redistributing power will remain important, and difficult, no matter the outcome of this election. Indeed, if things go as expected, the elections in November will be characterized by a low turnout among those very populations that suffer most from the economic conditions prevailing in the 1990s and in whose name the most persistent demands for justice have been raised.

The threat to minorities in general, and to the black community in particular, is twofold. First, winning politicians may continue to refuse to use the powers of government for positive action. Second, political campaigning will be driven by such incidents as the Willie Horton caper that ignore real issues and demean a whole racial group. Recent history gives ample evidence of this possibility in the policies and campaign tactics of Ronald Reagan and George Bush in the period 1980–1992.[2]

Changing Political Policy

There is a growing genre of writings, both popular and academic, that give ample attention to the social and economic philosophy and policies of the Reagan and Bush administrations. The general interpretation is that these policies represent a major impact, making the 1980s a distinctive—and regressive—era in U.S. political history. Little has been said, however, about policies on politics.[3] When the issue was raised, it was framed as a discussion of the threat of a "permanent Congress," term limitations, and campaign financing—items which betray a profound distrust of the voter, if not of democracy itself. There was little discussion about registration and voting. But, these two administrations have presided over a growing restriction of the American electorate. In the early 1990s, at the end of three terms of Republican presidential power, it is clear that the practice of political participation itself is a critical social justice problem in the United States.

The basic facts are undisputed. To exercise minimal influence on policy, Americans are called upon to cast ballots in a myriad of elections, at several levels of government at different times. There has been low voting at all levels. The last presidential election continued the decline, going back to the Kennedy-Nixon race of 1960, in the percentage of Americans voting. State and local contests have substantially lower turnout than even the presidential elections. The 1992 presidential primaries recorded lower levels of voter turnout compared to 1988.[4]

Low voting is marked, to be sure, by some condescension. The well-to-do may deem themselves above the political fray. But, low voting is characterized more so by ineffective participation among people who find it difficult to negotiate the maze of residency requirements, dual registration, cut-off dates, purges, English-language-only instructions, ballot security checks, awkward registration sites, or inconvenient office hours. Consequently they do not get registered to vote and cannot make their voices heard. Electoral participation is critical in setting the public agenda but remains low and skewed away from racial minorities and the poor.

The Legacy of the 1980s

In significant part, these conditions are a legacy of the ineffective voting reforms of the 1980s. Indeed, the Reagan and Bush administrations have been uniformly hostile to reforms designed to increase voter participation while supporting other voting changes (such as term limits) that decrease the choice of voters. In his first year in office, Reagan lobbied against an amendment to the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 that would have expanded the coverage of the act.[5] Reagan changed course on this in the face of overwhelming congressional and popular opinion and agreed to a compromise that preserved the essential changes necessary to improve the law.[6]

The Reagan-Bush administrations also gradually changed their opposition to other voting reforms. They came to support affirmative districting, for example. The single-member district was supported as an alternative to at-large election, and different patterns of districts were supported so that constituencies of majority-mi-

nority voters could be created usually ensuring the election of a minority. That change, while dramatic, had been slow in coming. The Reagan administration argued against these reforms in a number of lawsuits during the 1980s. By the 1990 round of reapportionment, the administration was accused of being prominority on redistricting![7] This turnabout is intriguing and provides further insight into the complex relationship, and trade-off, between efforts to expand the franchise and efforts, on the other hand, to adjust to the restricted electorate. Affirmative districting, for example, is used to compensate for underparticipation in minority populations. The administration, then, is in the position of rejecting voting improvement measures while supporting the compensatory device.[8]

The Reagan administration was effective in restricting the involvement of legal services lawyers in voting discrimination lawsuits. This decision was significant because of the cost of bringing voting litigation. The Legal Services Corporation is an independent, publicly funded agency that provides professional assistance to low income persons and communities not otherwise able to pay legal costs. The Reagan administration ordered the Legal Services Corporation to discontinue challenges to discrimination in voting on the grounds that this work is "political." The change placed more of a burden on the Department of Justice—a politically sensitive agency—and the private groups in the civil rights community. The Bush administration continued the attack on the Legal Services Corporation including a ban on legal support to communities challenging election structures.[9]

The Reagan and Bush administrations have been uniformly hostile to reforms designed to increase voter participation...

The Reagan administration was also active in blocking reform initiatives taken by the states and communities. In an extraordinary 1985 action, the full weight of federal power was brought to bear on the wide-spread investigation and prosecution of community-based voter registration and Get-Out-The-Vote activists in Alabama's Black Belt. Eight visible black community leaders were prosecuted, including Albert Turner who had been an organizer of the Selma marches. After a year of investigation, the government was able to convict only one of the persons on a minor charge of mishandling absentee ballots. Although a federal lawsuit charging selective prosecution was inconclusive, the effort amounted to harassment of leaders and effectively chilled political work for some time.

The National Litigation Campaign

Reagan's action is also well-illustrated by looking at the response to a special voter registration campaign in the mid-1980s. That campaign was developed by Human SERVE (Service Employees Registration and Voter Education) and involved a loose coalition of advocacy groups newly drawn to voting work including ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now), Project Vote, and Common Cause.[10] Groups in the campaign argued that the responsibility for voter registration was that of the government rather than individual citizens. The campaign sought to define the issue of participation in terms of three factors: first, that registration itself was the problem; second, that reform initiatives should be taken at the local level; and third, that practical remedies do exist within the authority of local officials. The key fact for the campaign was their finding that a relatively high level of voting occurs among citizens *once* they register. While voter turnout routinely measures below 50 percent when those voting are counted against all age-eligibles, the levels are much higher when voters are compared only to those registered. Not convinced that this was a sign of apathy, the sponsors of the registration campaign determined registration itself to be a barrier.[11]

The goal of the special campaign was to improve levels of voting by removing barriers to registration through action at the local level. This strategy seemed appealing. The barriers were embedded in the administrative process, were racially neutral on their face, and had not been brought within the scope of the federal Voting Rights Act. Further, the primary responsibility for setting registration requirements is at the state and local levels and all of these barriers were put in place there. Finally, this strategy allowed the reformers to give attention to innovative procedures in neighboring states that could be used as models. This last factor was helpful in two ways: It allowed them to rebut the charges that more open registration necessarily resulted in fraud; and it allowed them to show improvement in turnout levels. Finally, there were ideological and practical advantages to the local focus given the New Federalism of the Reagan-era which aimed to increase the role of local officials in all policy areas.

A range of specific reforms were advocated and several emerged as typical of the campaign. One would require voting officials to allow registration by mail. Another would expand the duties of certain agencies to include voter registration. This would apply to government social services agencies that serve large numbers of citizens in the normal course of business and include driver's license bureaus serving a general clientele as well as food surplus lines where the hard-core poor could be reached.

Another strategy was to file lawsuits where specific barriers could be challenged. However, unlike the expanding litigation under the Voting Rights Act, which focused on office holding, this litigation targeted registration. The challenges were often brought in state court pursuant to the state constitutions. Between 1984 and 1987 there were twenty-nine registration access lawsuits active in twelve states and in the federal courts.[12]

A key assumption in the strategic thinking of the campaign concerned the growing number of persons holding official positions who had an interest in easing access because they had been elected from biracial constituencies. It was expected that these officials would be sympathetic to reforms making their own base more firm. There were some dramatic gestures. In 1987, a task force of the National Association of Secretaries of State issued a report incorporating a good deal of the thinking of the campaign, stating that "...full participation awaits major reform and full implementation of the registration outreach methods that are already known and in use in states throughout the nation."[13]

Also, several officials moved decisively. Governors in Montana, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, and Texas —all states with significant minority populations— issued executive orders to institute some form of agency-based, nonpartisan registration.

Republican party officials opposed the efforts vigorously.[14] The Federal Office of Personnel Management wrote the governors with an opinion that the state actions violated federal law. After the 1984 election, the Reagan administration initiated investigations of the state orders. The action was especially noteworthy because such intervention went against the New Federalism ideology.[15]

Attempts at Voting Reform in the States

In the state of Mississippi, the state chapter of Operation PUSH (People United to Save Humanity) and other black citizens went into federal court and challenged the whole range of state registration laws. A federal lawsuit was filed in March 1984. After trials and appeals, the final decision was rendered seven years later in 1991! The Mississippi litigation represented an effort to use demonstrable evidence of discrimination to convince the federal court to require extensive registration reform. The court, however, deferred to the state legislature which corrected several flagrant practices and enacted a mail-registration law, but refused to pass any of the more radical measures.[16]

In California the results were also mixed. The state supreme court refused to hear the case which removed any possibility of a statewide ruling. However, a coalition of groups, including Common Cause, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, filed a suit in superior court challenging restrictive practices in Los Angeles county. County officials contested the lawsuit but the court ordered them to adopt an agency-based system.

Operating in the several states was expensive and time-consuming. Results were uneven. In some states with more flexible officials, negotiations were fruitful. In other states, local officials contested the proposed changes as vigorously in state court as in federal court. In others, federal court intervention was necessary, after all. The campaign was probably most effective in publicizing the alternative ways of looking at how to do registration and drawing attention to reforms actually in place in other states.[17]

The Federal Response

Another effort to address the problem of registration occurred at the federal level. During his first months in office, Jimmy Carter proposed to Congress a major reform in voter registration laws.[18] Carter's proposal included same-day registration, financial assistance to the states, registration by mail, off-site registrars, criminal penalties for fraud, and such other items as campaign financing for the House and Senate, direct popular election of the president, and modification of the Hatch Act. These proposals were introduced in Congress as the Universal Voter Registration Act of 1977. The legislation was not acted upon during the Carter years, 1977–1980.

But, with the victories by Reagan in 1980 and 1984, there was new official concern about voting.[19] During Reagan's second term, a comprehensive bill was proposed in Congress. The Universal Voter Registration Act of 1987 proposed to set up a uniform national registration law under federal control. The bill, sponsored by Alan Cranston, incorporated the main premises of the registration reform campaign but was directed at a federal-level response. It accepted the notion that voter registration is a government responsibility that should involve innovative outreach efforts and incentives. The bill included provisions for mail-in registration, election-day registration, and agency-based registration. It would have also provided a system of federal funding to encourage states to develop plans for compliance. This bill never received support from the president and did not pass Congress.

The behavior of the Reagan administration had a dramatic and confounding impact on how to think about voting. In Reagan, the country had its most politically conservative and actively partisan president in modern times. His outlook was narrow and, so it was expected, sure to provoke alternative mobilization among constituencies hurt by his policies but eligible to vote. Instead, in Reagan's 1984 bid for reelection and in Bush's election in 1988, the electorate returned the Republican party to presidential power on a *smaller* percentage of the voters than at the time of Reagan's first election!

Another proposal was introduced in Congress during the first year of the Bush presidency. It was less comprehensive than the Cranston bill but incorporated many of the ideas about registration that had become current. This bill did not receive presidential support but was more successful in that it passed the House but lost to a filibuster in the Senate in September of 1990 and again in 1991.

A third—less ambitious—voter registration bill was introduced. This was known as the *motor voter* bill, passed by Congress in 1992, that would allow voter

registration at driver's license bureaus. The legislation passed Congress but was vetoed by President Bush on July 2, four months before an election in which he was a candidate. This effectively ended the major federal legislative action although state-level proposals remain active.[20]

In the veto of the motor voter bill, Bush continued the legacy of hostility of the 1980s. However, on two other issues bearing on political access for racial minorities, the administration's position was less hostile. One concerns Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act requiring assistance to language minorities that expires in 1992.

The other issue concerns Supreme Court decisions. Two rulings in 1992 suggest that the federal judiciary, which had been a strong protector of voting rights, may be changing its stance. In one decision, the Court allowed a state law in Hawaii that prohibits write-in candidates to stand.[21] In another, the Court made a narrow interpretation of the Voting Rights Act to allow a local jurisdiction to change and reduce the powers of an office in reaction to the first election of a black person.

This second decision, *Presley* v. *Etowah County*,[22] came out of traditional bi-racial southern communities that exhibit a very typical bigotry. Successful lawsuits challenging at-large elections had forced previously all-white governing commissions to adopt single-member districts that guaranteed black majority districts. In response, the Alabama state legislature, raising images of the infamous gerrymander at Tuskegee, was prevailed upon to change and reduce the powers of the office. The state refused to submit the change for preclearance as required by Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act. The Court, stressing a narrow interpretation of the act, decided that the change was not really a change in voting and did not need to be submitted.

The decision in *Presley* was ominous for two reasons: first, the state's action was a direct response to effective use of the ballot by a minority; second, the change falls in a class of maneuvers made in response to empowerment efforts and is sure to invite similar changes in other jurisdictions. And, because government reorganization can be a rational decision unrelated to discrimination, scrutiny under Section 5 would be a way to develop standards and instill confidence. The Bush administration did support minority voters in this dispute by arguing to apply the act to the *Presley* circumstances. However, its efforts were blocked by the Court's majority, composed of Reagan-Bush appointees, who agreed with the narrow construction and exempted the change from coverage under the act.

Rethinking Voting Policy – Toward True Reform in the 1990s

The experience with voting reform in the 1980s is a starting point to rethink voting policy on the whole. Four factors make our task difficult. I have already mentioned the successful way in which the Reagan and Bush administrations have politicized voting access. A second factor is the dramatic rise of minority elected officials—a condition that obscures the continuing problem of popular participation.

Two other trends bear some mention in conclusion. Low voting levels may be explained away by certain otherwise well-meaning conceptions of the community of potential voters. This is especially troubling with respect to popular images associated with the neoconservative notions about the *urban underclass*. Theories about the essential character, or civic virtue, of the poor have always been a topic of concern in societies divided by wealth. Allegations about a distinctive psychology associated with racist oppression in the United States reemerges during each historical period. The political implication of this notion, in current discussions on poverty, is to undermine the very expectation that this population would act effectively in politics. It grounds the cause of ineffective political action in internal attributes. It will be difficult to see the significance of low voting where flawed agency is assumed on the part of a large sector of the population.

But, complacency is not the only assumption resulting from notions about the underclass. The notion appeals to the most backward instincts of the nation's liberal reform tradition—i.e., its paternal urge to act *for* victims rather than to act *with* them. When such attitudes gain currency among potential allies in the liberal wings of the parties, the major funding institutions, or in black leadership circles, it can produce bizarre results. One response has been to embrace a charismatic motivation that could "speak to" those in horrid social conditions and motivate them to join the electorate. This was the rationale behind the national mobilizations by Jesse Jackson during the 1980s. This notion represented a specific strategic alternative. But, the consequence has been continued low levels of voter participation and renewed doubts about the political impact of charism.

The political parties have adjusted to the restricted electorate and now compete on its terms. The Republicans, even when claiming their appeal to be anti-elitist and populist, learned this early and enjoyed successes especially in the presidential elections of Nixon, Reagan, and Bush.[23] The Democrats have moved increasingly in recent years to replicate that effort. One example is recent elections in Virginia where that party was able to recapture the governor's office and a U.S. Senate seat after a string of defeats in state elections. The election of the state's first black governor showed that the strategy had some implications for racial justice. Another example is 1986 midterm elections when Democrats won a string of seats to recapture a majority in the U. S. Senate by running a series of middle-of-the-road white men. The effort to transfer these tactics to the presidential level is represented in the rise of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC)—the group that has propelled the 1992 Clinton candidacy—where the platform and ideology are structured to compete within the known electorate.

But, such a strategy, while commendable in its realism and probably successful in retaining a competitive, two-party system, will hardly do much to change the basic discussion of public issues if the voting constituency remains exclusive. Racial minorities will continue to face an inattentive government or insulting campaign discourse as they are made into the issue that will tip the balance of an election.

There is little reason to expect any real improvement in voter participation given current policies and politics. But, it is important to think about the future. A starting point would be a uniform national system. Advocacy work would need to continue in communities to forge whatever changes are possible. But, the need to change official policy—national or local—should be complemented by an organizing strategy tied to political work among the nonvoters. The efforts to respond to low voting in the 1980s moved away from grassroots organizing to a focus on institutional barriers. This represented a significant turn that resulted in an increasing focus on legislative lobbying and bureaucratic reform.

It is a commentary on the changing times that the Voter Education Project (VEP)—organized in the seedbed of militant voter registration and education—closed down in January of 1992. That event marked the end of an institution intimately associated with mobilizing new voters in the black community. Its closing helps to focus attention on how and whether to revive an approach that may be fading as a tactic for empowerment. Insofar as VEP represents a model, it is one in which organizing is done for political results and the entreaty to register is openly connected to the goal of empowering new people to address their problems. The sense of the politics of that organizing was gradually lost and replaced by a nonpolitical stance justified by concerns over partisanship. During the 1980s, when concern mounted about low voting, and while all voting policies were increasingly politicized, the two were confused and the rational need to be nonpartisan, that was required in order to avoid capture by the two parties, was confused with the need to avoid a political stance altogether. So, the rationale for voter registration work loss the connection to power. It was sometimes stated as merely benign (where it means nothing) or dismissed as deceptive (a surreptitious partisan attack). Proponents of voter registration found themselves in the position of promising to keep their hands off politics! Today it is necessary to recapture the new voter mobilization represented by VEP and to reintegrate the political stance and grassroots methodology.

Notes

[1]See discussion about protest and politics in two recent books on the civil rights movement: Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988) and Fred Powledge, *Free at Last: The Civil Rights Movement and the People Who Made It* (Englewood Cliffs: Little Brown, 1991).

[2]And in local campaigns by Jesse Helms (in North Carolina), Guy Hunt (Alabama), David Duke (Louisiana), and John Silber (Massachusetts).

[3]Compare Kevin Phillips, *The Politics of Rich and Poor* (New York: Random House, 1990) or Haynes Johnson, *Sleepwalking Through History: America in the Reagan Years* (New York: Norton, 1991) with Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Why Americans Don't Vote* (New York: Pantheon, 1987).

[4]For data and opinions about the persistence of voter participation as a problem see Frances Piven and Cloward, *Why Americans Don't Vote; Voting and Registration in the Election of November, 1984,* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1985); *Voter Participation Statistics from Recent Elections in Selected Countries,* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, November, 1987); *Non-Voter Study, '88–'89,* (Washington, D.C.: Committee for the Study of the American Electorate, 1988).

[5]The issue is difficult to describe without legal jargon. It involved Section 2 of the act which a 1980 Supreme Court decision (*City of Mobile* v. *Bolden*) had restricted to those situations where discrimination resulted from conscious "intent" of governmental officials.

[6]See Dianne Pinderhughes, "Black Interest Groups and the 1982 Voting Rights Act," (1983).

[7]See, for example, editorial "America's 'Segremanders,'" *Wall Street Journal,* 2 April 1992, and more generally, Abigail M. Thernstrom, *Whose Votes Count? Affirmative Action and Minority Voting Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

[8]On the voting rights movement see Laughlin McDonald, "The Quiet Revolution in Minority Voting Rights," *Vanderbilt Law Review* 42 (May, 1989): 1249–97.

[9]See U. S. district and appeal court rulings in *Texas Rural Legal Aid, Inc.* v. *Legal Services Corporation* 740 F. Supp. 880 (1990) and *Texas Rural Legal Aid, Inc. v. Legal Services Corporation* 940 F. 2d. 685 (1991).

[10]Where lawsuits were involved they were handled by the litigation groups like the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or the ACLU. See Cynthia A. Williams, "Current Litigation Challenging Voter Registration Procedures," Appendix D in Piven and Cloward, *Why Americans Don't Vote,* 272–290.

[11]*After the Voting Rights Act: Registration Barriers,* Report of the Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights, U. S. House of Representatives, 98th Congress, 2nd Sess., October 1984; Piven and Cloward, *Why Americans Don't Vote;* Committee for the Study of the American Electorate, *Creating the Opportunity: How Changes in Registration and Voting Law Can Enhance Voter Participation* (Washington, D.C.: 1987); National Association of Secretaries of State, *Barriers to Voting* (Columbus, Ohio: Office of the Secretary of State, 1987); Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights, *Barriers to Registration and Voting: An Agenda for Reform* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Policy Alternatives, 1988); and Farley Peters, Sandra Martin, and Beth Kyle (eds.) *Voter Registration and the States: Effective Policy Approaches to Increasing Participation* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Policy Alternatives, 1986).

[12]Lani Guinier's Statement of 13 June 1984 states the goals of the litigation aspect of the campaign (New York: NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 1984).

[13]*Barriers to Voting,* 17. See also *After the Voting Rights Act: Registration Barriers.*

[14]Ann Cooper, "GOP and Democrats Split over Public Agencies Signing up the Poor to Vote," *National Journal* (16 June 1984): 1175–77.

[15]Peter Earley, "OPM Chief Queries States on Vote Drive," *Washington Post,* 28 September 1984.

[16]See trial and appeals court opinions in *Mississippi State Chapter, Operation PUSH* v. *Allain* 674 F. Supp. 1245 (16 November 1987); *Mississippi State Chapter, Operation PUSH* v. *Mabus* 717 F. Supp. 1189 (18 July 1989); and *Mississippi State Chapter, Operation Push* v. *Mabus* 932 F. 2d 400 (31 May 1991).

[17]Cynthia Williams and Linda Davidoff, *Litigating the Rights to Register and to Cast a Ballot: A Summary of Current Cases and Approaches,* (New York: Human SERVE, October, 1986).

[18]See *Changes in the Electoral Process,* Carter's message to Congress, 22 March 1977.

[19]See *Voter Participation Statistics from Recent Elections in Selected Countries,* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, November, 1987) and *Recent Voter Turnout in Selected States and Major Cities,* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 29 January 1988).

[20]Jo-Anne Chasnow, "News on Agency-Based Voter Registration" (New York: 100% Vote/Human SERVE, April 1992).

[21]*Burdick* v. *Takushi* (8 June 1992).

[22]*Presley* v. *Etowah County* (27 January 1992).

[23]On the place of populist thinking in Republican party strategy see Phillips, *The Politics of Rich and Poor.*

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Vote Dilution Research: Methods of Analysis

by
Sheila Ards and Marjorie Lewis

Why have issues which disproportionately affect African Americans not been brought to the policy forefront and given attention properly so that effective solutions can be found? Because of their roles as controllers of the government's budget, politicians and other policy makers decide which problems will be addressed. It is important, therefore, that African Americans elect political candidates of their choice. In the past, African Americans largely were outside the arena of public-policy setting. Thus, solutions to problems which disproportionately affected African Americans were not pursued.

Since African Americans represent only 12 percent of the U.S. population, rational behavior by the 88 percent majority population might assure that the political voice of the 12 percent minority never be adequately heard. Through such racial gerrymandering techniques such as *cracking* (dispersing large concentrations of minorities among several districts), *stacking* (combining several concentrations of minority population along with a greater white population to assure a white majority), and *packing* (combining minority voters into one or more districts to minimize the number of districts controlled by blacks),[1] minority voices have been diluted in elections for state and local offices. African Americans have not been successful in electing the candidates who will address issues of importance to the African-American community.

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Patterns of Voting

After years of pushing for residential integration, the majority of Americans are still living in racially segregated neighborhoods. For whatever the reasons, African Americans primarily live in areas where other African Americans live. Because the African-American population is a small percentage of the general population, one usually finds African Americans living in residential clusters.

Through the process of gerrymandering over the years, African-American populations have been either stacked, packed, or cracked, as described above. Thus, candidates running for elected office court the votes of non-African-American voters. The votes of African Americans in many instances are not needed to win the election. Therefore, the major issues confronting African Americans, in particular, largely go unresearched and unsolved. In order for an African American to elect his or her candidate of choice, that candidate would have to be the candidate of choice of the majority population as well.

Table 1 visually presents the following discussion. In Table 1, voters are classified as African American and non-African American. The candidate of choice is classified as being the choice of African Americans or the choice of non-African Americans. The candidate of choice of either group reflects that over 50 percent of the groups's population voted for the candidate. Here, we do not assume that the candidate of choice for African Americans is also African American, although much of the discussion in this area has presumed this to be the case.

Table 1

	% Voters		Candidate of Choice	
Voters	Voting Pop	% Voted	African-American (AA)	Non-AA
AA	1000	90	80	20
Non-AA	9000	90	10	90

If the candidate of choice of the majority of African Americans is the same as the candidate of choice of the majority of non-African Americans, then there is no problem. The problem arises when the candidate of choice of African Americans is different from the candidate of choice of non-African Americans.

In Table 1, African Americans make up 10 percent of the voting age population. Ninety percent of both groups voted in the election. Eighty percent of the African-American voters voted for Candidate A. Only 10 percent of the non-African-American voters voted for Candidate A. Because African Americans constituted a small proportion of the total population, Candidate A could only win by obtaining votes from non-African Americans. When, however, non-African-American voters intentionally and deliberately vote for only non-African-American candidates of choice, the process is called *bloc voting*.

Although the candidate of choice of African Americans does not have to be African-American, we now will assume for this discussion that to be the case. In addition, we will assume that the candidate of choice of non-African Americans is white. Over the past several decades, a number of African-American candidates have

won state and local elections in majority non-African-American areas. These elections experienced a large concentration of white-voter *crossing over,* voting for the African American candidate. Attention is not being focused on these elections or how they differ from past elections because they have been the exception, not the rule. Much of the research to date has been on just the opposite phenomenon—large contingencies of white voters voting against an African-American candidate.

Estimating Racial Bloc Voting

The literature details several ways for testing and measuring racial bloc voting.[2] Two techniques—*homogeneous precinct analysis* and *bivariate regression*—are commonly discussed. *Multivariate analysis* and *logit modeling* will be described.

Homogeneous Precinct Analysis

Homogeneous precinct analysis is by far the easiest and most straightforward technique for estimating vote dilution. Homogeneous precinct analysis requires that the statistician isolate two groups of precincts: one group with precincts of 90 percent or more potential African-American voters and another group of precincts with less than 10 percent African-American voters. For each precinct, the level of voter participation by whites and African Americans and the votes cast by these two groups for different candidates are compared. Again, we can use Table 1. If the preferred candidate of African-American voters receives a substantially smaller percentage of votes by white voters, then there is the possibility that votes for the preferred candidate of African Americans are diluted by bloc voting by whites.

Returning to Table 1, we see that there are clear racial voting patterns. African Americans primarily voted for Candidate A. Only 10 percent of non-African Americans voted for Candidate A. Given the size of the African American population when compared to the general population, African Americans will never be able to elect their candidate of choice unless there is a large number of cross-over votes.

There are several significant problems in conducting homogeneous precinct analysis. First, the estimates of bloc voting are normally based on a small, possibly unrepresentative, sample of the electorate. The population within homogeneous precincts may make up only a small number of voters within all precincts. Second, only the behavior of voters in homogeneous areas is examined; the electoral behavior of those residing in heterogeneous or mixed precincts is ignored. And third, in many political jurisdictions there is an absence, or near absence, of precincts that can be considered homogeneous. Thus, in those jurisdictions one would be unable to estimate racial bloc voting.

For the most part, homogenous precinct analysis may give us very biased conclusions. Given that the precincts have to be homogeneous, one may also question the attitudes and preferences of those who live within these neighborhoods and their willingness to vote for candidates who are very different from themselves. Those who live in more heterogenous neighborhoods may be willing to consider candidates from other backgrounds. In addition, in some localities it may be difficult to find precincts which meet the homogeneity requirements, while there may be many heterogeneous precincts. Thus, behavioral information from voters in these heterogenous precincts is lost in homogeneous precinct analysis. These potential problems force us to consider other possible techniques for analysis.

Bivariate Regression Analysis

Bivariate regression analysis allows the inclusion of information about voting behavior in *all* of the precincts in a political jurisdiction. These models consist of one dependent variable and one independent variable. The dependent variable is what we are trying to predict. In our example, we will let the dependent variable equal the percent of votes Candidate A receives. The independent variable, which is the data by which we are using to predict the dependent variable, will be the percent of African Americans who voted in the election. In much of the research to date, variables such as the percent of the voting population that is African American or the percent of African Americans who voted in the election have been the more commonly used independent variables.

For bivariate regression models, we only need to collect data on the dependent variable and the independent variable from each precinct. The results from the statistical analysis give the information for drawing a straight line: $Y = a - bX$,

where Y is the dependent variable
X is the independent variable
a is the Y-intercept
and, b is the slope of the line.

The bivariate regression gives estimates of a and b. The value of the Y-intercept is a measure of how many votes Candidate A received if no African-American voted for Candidate A. The value of b, the slope, is the value of the increase in Y for every one percentage increase in X. Given information on a and b, one is able to input a value for X and obtain an estimate of Y—the percent of votes Candidate A receives. From the behavior of the electorate in past elections, one is able to predict how the electorate of each precinct within the sample will vote for Candidate A. Of course, the same methodology can be conducted for examining whites voting for non-African-American candidates.

Another product of the bivariate regression is the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r). The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient measures the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable. In our case, r measures the relationship between the racial composition of the population and the number of votes a candidate receives. The value of r can range from -1 to 1. A positive r suggests

that as one variable increases, the other variable also increases. A negative r suggests as one variable increases, the other variable decreases. An r value of zero suggests that there is no relationship between the two variables.

One major weakness of bivariate analysis in voting dilution research is that it can sometimes predict a value for the dependent variable beyond the normal range of zero to 100 percent. This is especially a concern if the data shows that the dependent variable lies close to zero or 100. In voter dilution research, the dependent variable is usually the percent of votes a candidate receives and the percent is likely, in some cases, to come close to zero or 100. This problem has led to a number of suggestions by political scientists and statisticians. The econometric literature suggests constraining the predicted value of the dependent variable within the zero to 100 percent range through the use of a logit model.

Logit Model

The logit model has not been used in litigation before the courts. However, these models correct for the major disadvantage of the bivariate model. The logit model recasts the dependent variable into a log odds format. The logit model is represented as:

$$Log\ (P/1-P) = a + bX + e$$

where P equals the percent of votes the candidate of choice receives. The error term (e) represents the error associated with a predictive model. The new dependent variable is the log of the odds of the percent of votes the candidate of choice receives. As stated earlier, the predicted value of this new dependent variable is constrained to be within the zero to 100 percent range. Now, we are estimating what are the log odds of a candidate to receive votes.

After one obtains a technically feasible value of the dependent variable, one seeks to explain the relationship between the race of the voting population to the number of votes a candidate receives. This can be done through the transformation: $@P/@X = P(1-P)b$. The result from this transformation tells us how a one percentage increase in X (in our case, the percent of the voting population that is black) will change the percentage of votes a candidate receives.

The benefits from using the logit model outweighs the cost of the model. The logit model produces a technically possible number within the appropriate range. This model does not require collection of additional data beyond the bivariate regression case. In addition, the logit model does not require extensive rewriting of existing bivariate regression programs. Although the use of these models has not been discussed in court cases, the benefits of these models should be explored.

Multivariate Regression

Another extension of the bivariate framework is multivariate regression analysis. Multivariate regression analysis does not constrain the model to one explanatory variable. Other variables in addition to the race of the voting population can be used to predict the percentage of votes a candidate receives. Other possible variables to include in the model would be: 1) the median household income of the population; 2) the percent of the population with greater than a four-year college education; and 3) the average age of the resident population.

There have been a number of elections in the past decade where the racial composition of the electorate would have been a poor predictor of the percent of votes a candidate would receive. Attorney Douglas Wilder won the Governorship of Virginia although African Americans made up a small percentage of the total electorate. Multivariate regression analysis may give a greater insight into what factors other than race are important to a candidate's success in winning an election. In addition, multivariate analysis may help us crystalize what is happening when a large number of whites cross over to vote for a minority candidate.

Multivariate analysis can also be used in conjunction with the logit mode. Thus, the logit model would incorporate more than one explanatory variable. The new form of the logit model would be $Log\ (P/1-P) = a + bX + cY + dZ + ..+ e$, where X, Y, Z, and others, would represent different variables to explain the log odds of the percent of votes a candidate receives.

Conclusion

Although *Thornburg* v. *Gingles* eased the burden of proof on the plaintiff in proving racial bloc voting, much of that proof has been based upon the simplest forms of statistical analysis. These forms of statistical analysis would be sufficient if they did not produce incorrect and, in some cases, impossible results.

These authors suggest the use of a multivariate logit model in vote dilution analysis. Not only does the multivariate logit model constrain the predicted value of the percentage of votes for the candidate within the appropriate range, but it also allows for inclusion of variables other than race as explanatory variables.

The 1990 census and the 1992 election give us much new data to measure the levels of racial bloc voting in elections. Let us analyze this information with the most appropriate tools available.

Notes

[1]Frank R. Parker, *Reapportionment in a Nutshell: An Outline of Constitutional and Statutory Requirements* (Lawyers' Committee For Civil Rights Under Law, Suite 400, 4400 Eye Street, Northwest, Washington, D.C. 20005).

[2]Richard L. Engstrom and Michael D. McDonald, "Quantitative Evidence in Vote Dilution Litigation: Political Participation and Polarized Voting," *The Urban Lawyer* 17, no. 3 (Summer 1985).

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Ron Daniels: Profile of a Presidential Candidate

by

Harold Horton

The mass media has said very little about it, but Ron Daniels, an African American, is a presidential candidate. In 1988, Daniels was the southern regional coordinator and deputy campaign manager for Jesse Jackson's campaign. Daniels, a veteran social and political activist as well as former director of the National Rainbow Coalition, declared his candidacy for president at a news conference October 14, 1991.

From 1974 to 1980, Daniels served as president of the National Black Political Assembly and in 1980, he was the chairperson of the founding convention of the National Black Independent Political Party. Daniels was the convener of the African-American Progressive Action Network (AAPAN). He writes a weekly column, *Vantage Point*, published in more than one hundred African-American and progressive newspapers nationwide.

Daniels delivered a major address at the annual banquet of the Boston Black Political Task Force on July 31, 1992, at Roxbury Community College. It was clear from his remarks as well as from my observations that Daniels is a person of courage, conviction, and confidence.

Why Run for the Presidency?

In a brochure announcing a national call to attend the People's Progressive Convention that was held August 21–23, 1992, in Ypsilanti, Michigan, Daniels stated that, "every four years...it has become clear that no matter which establishment party candidate for president wins, we will get the lesser of two evils. We do not get what our country desperately needs...We need fundamental change in the economic and political structures of our society...For no matter who wins, the quality of our lives continues to deteriorate."

A Grassroots Movement That Seeks Change

At the August convention, Daniels proclaimed, "We will no longer tolerate our disenfranchisement by those in power, and we will take steps to unify into an ongoing, united, independent, permanent, grassroots movement. ...And while the People's Progressive Convention cannot be expected to launch a third party, it can be a vehicle to demonstrate our intention to come together and build a movement capable of uniting around a collective program and taking action to bring about real change."

And, in an article of May 11, 1992, that appeared in *Vantage Point*, "The Rodney King Verdict: No Justice, No Peace," Daniels made the following statement:

> The verdict in the Rodney King trial reaffirmed for the world what Africans in America already know, that racism is alive and well in the U.S....that black people have no rights which a racist and exploitative system is compelled to respect. ...Hence, the battle cry which reverberated throughout this nation and the world was "no justice, no peace." For nearly twenty-five years the masses of black people, minorities, poor and working people in the inner cities have been abandoned, neglected, and left to suffer peacefully. Now the bitter harvest of racism, abandonment, and neglect has come to fruition..."

Ron Daniels's Goal for a New America

The Ron Daniels for President Campaign for a New Tomorrow quoted the candidate in a news release issued June 15, 1992:

> ...the tasks of building a political movement...must be taken up by scores of community-based leaders and progressive activists from around this nation. It is the goal of our independent campaign for president to gather up and galvanize the broadest possible spectrum of people willing to join in this endeavor. As Malcolm X once put it, "it will either be freedom for everybody or freedom for nobody." A new America must be born in which the needs of human beings, not the narrow pursuit of profit, property, and materialism will be the priority of government and economy.

Daniels is off and running for the presidency of the United States. He is well aware of his chances of winning the race. However, this is America, and he has decided to exercise one of his rights as an American citizen. We must exercise ours, and vote for the person of our choice.

For further information about the Ron Daniels Campaign for a New Tomorrow write to P.O. Box 27798, Washington, D.C. 20038–7798.

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